GOLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

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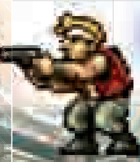
METAL SLUG

SNK'S CLASSIC FRANCHISE FINALLY HITS THE PSP

THE MAKING OF...

THE LAST NINJA

MARK CALE AND JOHN TWIDDY ON ONE OF THE COOLEST NINJA TRILOGIES EVER MADE





BARGAIN HUNT

EVERY GAMES MACHINE LISTED

WANT TO START COLLECTING VINTAGE HARDWARE? CHECK OUT OUR EXHAUSTIVE LISTING

WHY YOU MUST PLAY...

PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

REDISCOVERING THE CLASSIC RPG CRIMINALLY IGNORED BY THE MASSES

THE MAKING OF...

MONKEY ISLAND

RON GILBERT REVEALS THE SECRETS BEHIND HIS CLASSIC ADVENTURE

HEAD OVER HEELS...

JON RITMAN

THE 8-BIT GENIUS TALKS ABOUT HIS GREATEST ISOMETRIC ACHIEVEMENT

THE DEFINITIVE...

XEVIOUS

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO ONE OF GAMING'S EARLIEST SHOOT-'EM-UPS



FEATURED THIS MONTH IN RETRO

SEGA SATURN WHY SEGA'S 32-BIT WONDER DESERVES A PLACE IN YOUR GAMES COLLECTION

RANGER X QUITE SIMPLY THE COOLEST SHOOTER YOU'LL EVER PLAY

DUNGEON MASTER DELVING INTO THE CREATION OF FTL'S INFLUENTIAL RPG

DOUBLE DRAGON WHY WE ARE STILL ACHING TO PLAY TECHNOS' FLAWED BRAWLER

THE RETROBATES

WORST GAME EVER



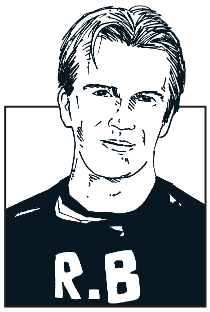
ASHLEY DAY

That would have to be *Death Mask* on the CD32. I'm fascinated by first-person shooters on the Amiga but it's hard to deny that this A500 port is anything more than a complete stinker.
Expertise: The world's second best retro magazine
Currently playing:
Metal Slug Anthology
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



DAVID CROOKES

Back To The Future Part II for the Master System was a truly awful game. If you touched anything, you pretty much died. I bought it since I loved the trilogy but I wish I could have gone back in time and left it alone.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Oddworld: Abe's Odyssey
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



RICHARD BURTON

Out Run (Amstrad) – Loaded it once (utter toss) and haven't touched it since the day it was purchased from Helston Computer Centre circa 1988. I kept it purely for the original soundtrack.
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming.
Currently playing:
Caveman (by Grandstand)
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

Worst game? Without question *Halo*, it was utter garbage. I only bought it because some friend said it was brilliant. Clearly he was insane, since even the original *Half-Life* was better!
Expertise: Doujin games
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories
Favourite game of all time:
Trampoline Gunmen



PAUL DRURY

I was sent *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* to review for PSP. It was akin to watching a beloved child being abused. The idiots had made the sublime, ridiculous.
Expertise: Getting programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Dancing Stage Euromix. (On hard.)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



MIKE TOOLEY

Sunsoft's *Daze Before Christmas* on the Mega Drive. Every year I get it out for some festive cheer and every year it disappoints. Jingle Bells grates, and Father Christmas disappoints as the game hero. The game has everything, but it's just wrong.
Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played
Currently playing:
Phantasy Star Universe
Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!



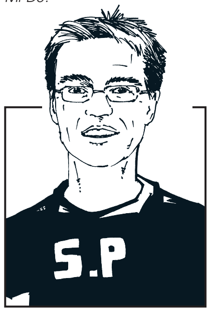
DARRAN JONES

Captain Blood. Everyone at school was raving about it so I picked it up for the Amstrad. I wish I hadn't because it was bloody terrible. I can see why people love it, but it didn't gel with me.
Expertise: Juggling a wife, two children and Retro Gamer
Currently playing:
Lost Planet
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



CRAIG GRANNELL

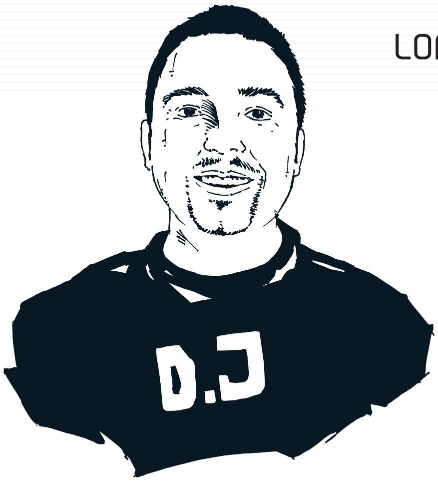
Virtua Striker 2 for Dreamcast is pretty dreadful, and I only took it when forced to at gunpoint. Oh, okay: it was in a games bundle I bought, and I never bothered to offload it.
Expertise: Games whose controllers don't require you to have 37 fingers
Currently playing:
Sensible Soccer
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



SIMON PHILLIPS

Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards. I was a massive fan of the pink blob's early NES adventures, but this was a real disappointment that wasn't anywhere near as good as it looked. What a shame.
Expertise:
Juggling babies and work
Currently playing:
Gears Of War
Favourite game of all time:
Head Over Heels

LOADING...



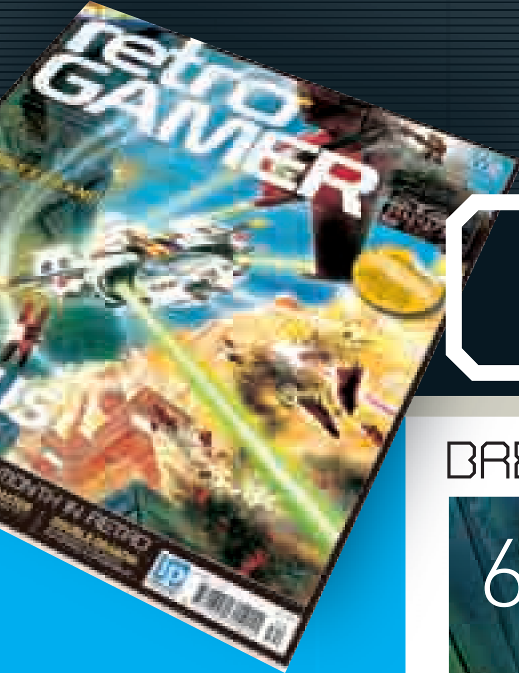
I'll be the first to admit that when I finally got to play on a retail Wii I was a little disappointed with its Virtual Console. While it launched with a set of games, including *Super Mario 64, Donkey Kong Country, Sonic The Hedgehog* and *The Legend Of Zelda* not everyone was happy.

Indeed, visit any website with threads about the VC and you'll find forumites attacking Nintendo for not allowing all PAL games to run at a full 60Hz (and therefore running a full 17.5 per cent faster and in full screen like their NTSC counterparts). At first, I too was incensed, but now I've actually started to play the likes of *Gunstar Heroes* and *Super Castlevania IV*, the real truth is that it's not affected my enjoyment of these titles in the slightest.

I don't sit at home playing *Altered Beast* bemoaning the fact that it's running slower than a version I don't actually own. I'm just glad that I get a way to play some great games without having to rely on filling up the precious space under my TV with numerous old consoles.

Forum readers have been asking if we'll be marking down these 'inferior' versions, and the short answer is no. We'll review each future VC game on its own merits, and unless any are severely hampered in the gameplay department, we won't be mentioning the 50Hz vs 60Hz debate ever again. Just be happy that you can once again sit down in front of the TV with your favourite classic games of yesteryear. I certainly am.





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THE MAKING OF…

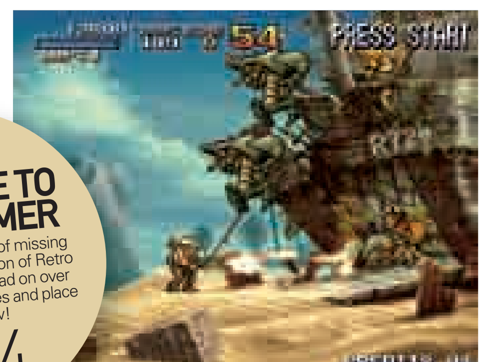


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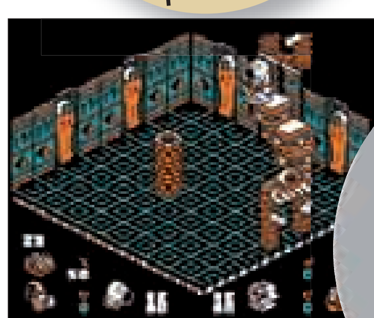
p104



THE MAKING OF…
SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND



WHY YOU MUST PLAY
PANZER DRAGOON SAGA



THE MAKING OF…
HEAD OVER HEELS

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

RETRORADAR

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…



Perfect Dark Zero failed to ignite gamers' passions in quite the same way as the N64 version did.

HERO OF THE MONTH



RATTLE & ROLL

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero. This month it's the star of *Snake Rattle & Roll*

First appearance: *Snake Rattle & Roll*

Distinguishing features: Being snake-like, massive eyes

Weapon of choice: Tongues

Most likely to: Eat Nibbley Pibbleys

Least likely to: Sing Elvis Presley songs

Unusual fact: *Snake Rattle & Roll* received a mostly unheard of sequel in 1991 for the monochrome Game Boy, called *Sneaky Snakes*

STAMPER BROTHERS DISAPPEAR

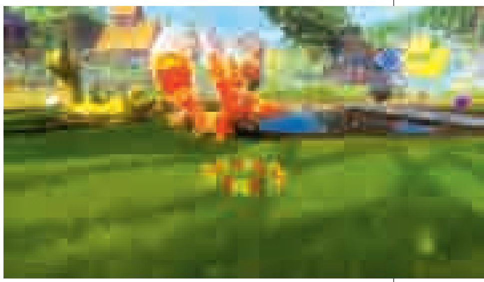
CHRIS AND TIM STAMPER TO LEAVE RARE STUDIOS

In an announcement that sent shockwaves rippling across the entire industry, it was revealed that Rare's Chris and Tim Stamper are leaving the company. Speaking with 1UP.com, Microsoft categorically stated that the Stampers' departure had "absolutely" nothing to do with slow sales of *Viva Piñata* on 360 and went on to say, "Chris and Tim have helped shape Rare into the world-renowned development studio that it is today and their impact on the videogame industry as a whole is well known."

For British gamers this hails the end of a 25-year legacy. In 1982 the brothers, along with Chris' girlfriend, Linda, and old college friend John Latchbury, formed Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd and worked next door to their parents' house in Ashby-de-la-Zouch. They soon began trading under the name Ultimate Play The Game, before releasing, *Jetpac*, their first major success in 1983. In 1987 the brothers sold off Ultimate to US Gold, eating up Rare but, shrewdly, kept all the rights to their original IP. They went on to devise many games for all of Nintendo's systems up until the GameCube, before being bought by Microsoft in 2002 for a cool $375 million and absorbed into the Microsoft Game Studios collective.

A mere four years later and the two heads of the company have left. In those four years, Rare created titles such as *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, *Perfect Dark Zero* and *It's Mr Pants!* With the exception of the recent *Viva Piñata*, none have received critical acclaim, and none at all have been huge commercial successes, leading to speculation by fans that the real talent at the company left to form Free Radical in 1999. With the Stampers' departure, Microsoft has revealed that Gregg Mayles and Mark Betteridge (a 19-year veteran of the company) will succeed the Stampers as creative director and studio director, respectively.

Simon Farmer, Rare's General Manager, has been working at Rare since the late Eighties and was more than happy to discuss life at the Twycross based studio. "I've been with Rare since 1989 and I think the fact that I've worked for them for that amount of time, says a lot about the respect, belief and regard in which I and others hold Tim and Chris. The two of them compliment one another perfectly, with Tim being the artistic, fiery, temperamental one and Chris the logical calmer side of the overall vision."



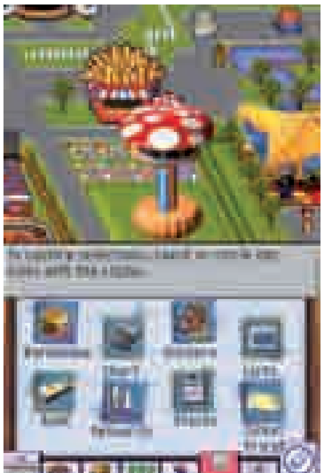
Many in the industry felt that *Viva Piñata* was a return to form for Rare, but how will its future releases be affected by the recent departure?

Despite the sad departure – "a few of us old timers have been here 18-years-plus" – Farmer remains confident for Rare's future. "Many of us have worked for Tim and Chris for quite some time now," he continues. "We grew up in the industry with them; we went through the highs and lows together and have witnessed huge changes in the business. We've learnt a great deal from them and combined with our own vision, we're all looking forward to continuing the Rare tradition of producing great games. It's really the next exciting chapter in the history of the company." After playing the wonderful *Viva Piñata* it's a sentiment we'd have to agree with.

MAKE PEOPLE BARF ON YOUR DS

THEME PARK ANNOUNCED FOR NINTENDO'S HANDHELD

From the cosmopolitan city of Tokyo, on 30 November 2006, Electronic Arts revealed its Japanese studio was exclusively developing a DS version of the classic management simulator, *Theme Park*. Stan Chow, general manager of EA Japan and executive producer of *Theme Park* stated: "*Theme Park* is one of EA's long-standing properties, and we are excited to breathe new life into the series by bringing it to the NDS platform for the first time ever." He also explained the nature of touch-screen controls, "Taking advantage of the unique controls in the NDS, we are able to create an easy-to-pick-up game that offers the experience of creating and managing your own park to audiences of all age and gender. The game will have the depth to satisfy fans of the series, and also be accessible to lighter and new gamers with its user-friendly controls." It's marked for release this spring.



Bringing it closer to the PC original, options and icons can be intuitively selected with the stylus. For those who previously played the console ports, this is welcome news.

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 13: JETPAC

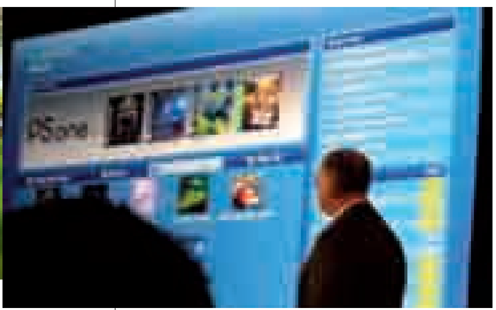
How could we not feature *Jetpac* as Loading Screen Of The Month, in light of recent news? This image of a spaceman with rainbow ZX Spectrum-coloured laser, is surely the first prominent mark in the history of Rare? For those fortunate enough to have been there at that time, what are you now feeling 25 years later?



JUST IN SONY AND MIDWAY HAVE TEAMED UP TO MAKE *MORTAL KOMBAT II*, *GAUNTLET II*, *JOUST*, *RAMPAGE WORLD TOUR*, *RAMPART* AND *CHAMPIONSHIP SPRINT* AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD ON PS3.

HACKERS GIVE SONY THE FINGER

HACKED CUSTOM 3.02 FIRMWARE ALLOWS ANY PSONE TITLE TO BE PLAYED



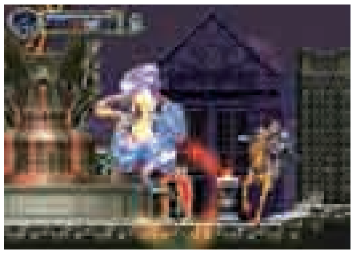


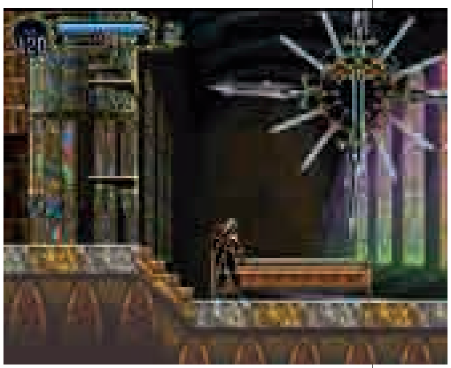
Top: Why buy a PS3 and then pay Sony more money for games you already own, simply to play them on PSP? With this new hack you can do it for free. **Bottom:** Do not be afraid by technical screens such as this. There are countless friendly people online who will hold your hand throughout the entire process.

Courtesy of PSPfanboy.com and other such sites, countless PSP and PSone fans were informed on Christmas day that legendary scene figure and exceptionally skilled hacker Dark_AleX had released a custom PSP firmware which freely allowed the playing of any PSone game on your PSP. This comes after much outrage at Sony forcing Japanese and American gamers to not only pay for PSP compatible PSone game downloads, but also the mandatory need to use a PS3 as a download interface. Worse still is that the Sony-sanctioned PSone purchases available are extremely limited, with many complaining about some of the better PSone games being conspicuously absent.

Dark_AleX's release works by emulating the 3.02 firmware, while also cracking the DMR and other security measures present in the system. The precise technicalities are of little consequence; all you need to know is that it's possible to take an original PSone disc, rip the game, convert it from an ISO into an EBOOT file, and then load it onto a suitable-sized memory card in order to play. Forumites the world over have been delighted to finally play titles like *Symphony Of The Night* and *Vandal Hearts* on the move.

While Retro Gamer does not support or condone piracy, or illegally downloading PSone titles, we do fully support every gamer's right to play the PSone games they legitimately own, on their PSP handhelds. It's a bit of a cheek that Sony is trying to make people pay again for games they already own, simply to play them on the PSP – this new hack shows that there is no need for this. Power to the people, vive la Révolution, down with corporate tyranny, and up with being able to play any of your PSone games freely on PSP. For more information, including the necessary files, search Google.





Above and right: We relish any excuse, any excuse at all, to feature images of *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. Retro Gamer will not rest until every human being has played it.

LIST-ME-DO DADDIO!

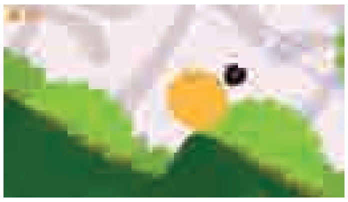
VOTE FOR YOUR TOP 25 PLATFORMERS. AN EXCITING CHANCE FOR READERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO RETRO GAMER…

Retro Gamer is always thinking of ways to increase reader interaction, and what better way than by allowing you to influence the coverage and content? This is your chance to rock the vote by voting for your favourite platformers of all time. Every reader is allowed five votes, and they must be in order of preference as points will be allocated for tiebreaking purposes. But this isn't simply about creating a list of games; we would also like you to write a couple of sentences about your choices – say whatever you like. The best, funniest, silliest, or simply those we like will be quoted in the mag along with your name immortalised in print. Amaze your friends and astound your family by showing them your contribution to the history of gaming – and then live forever in the annals of journalism. Or something.

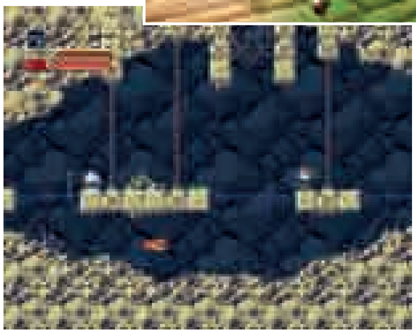
You can vote for any platformer, 2D or 3D, on any game system ever, from Atari 2600 to PS3. Whether it's classics like *Manic Miner*, 3D titles like *Tomb Raider*, modern releases like *LocoRoco*, or even indie games such as *Cave Story*, every platformer is welcome. It's not about what we or anyone else want; it's about what YOU want. It's your choice, so go crazy. Votes must be in by 1 February, either by snail mail, through the forum, or via email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk. Ooh, and don't forget to put Greatest Platform Games as the subject.



Jak And Daxter on PS2 was a platform game, and therefore technically eligible for voting… If that's what floats your boat. We prefer *Mario 64* personally.



Featuring large chubby balls of cuddly singing jelly, how can anyone not love *LocoRoco*? It's proper old-fashioned platforming on a modern system.



Could *Cave Story* be the most magical freeware platform game of all time? Only you can decide through the democratic act of voting.

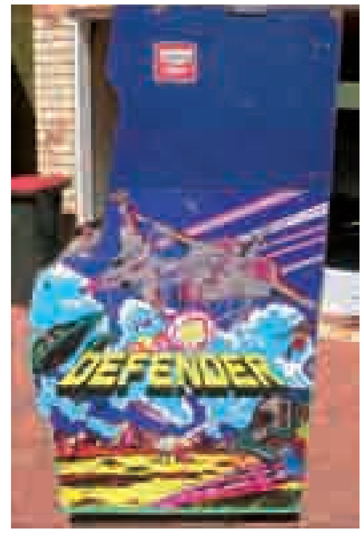








» One of a handful of *Defenders* with Prototype artwork.



» Taito *Defender* side art on a *Space Invaders*-styled cabinet.





» 26-years worth of dust, beer, sweat and cigarette butts.

» **Above:** My battered defender BEFORE the restoration had started. **Right:** Phil's stencilled new cab art has to be seen to be believed.

COMMENT

DEFENDER CHESTNUTS

Defender has to be one of the biggest selling arcade games of all time, right up there with *Pac-Man* and *Asteroids* in terms of numbers sold. History indicates that somewhere in the region of 60-70,000 were sold, at up to $2,500 a pop. To put that in perspective, the total retail revenue for that one game was approx $160 million, in 1981, so in today's terms that's the equivalent of nearly 0.5 BILLION dollars. From sales of just one arcade game.

Unsurprisingly, *Defender* was also one of the most widely bootlegged arcade games, with a handful of direct rip-offs where the code was copied directly and merely the title screen changed; the most notable is "*Defense Command*", which led to a big legal case stateside. I remember seeing another bootleg called '*Tornado*' in a *Pac-Man*-shaped cab.

Beside the rip-off versions popping up all over the Far East, there were also a few officially licensed versions. Not many people know that Taito, famous for inventing *Space Invaders* in 1978, did actually license *Defender* from Williams and promptly created an official Taito *Defender* arcade machine. I am fortunate to actually own one, and as you can see from the pictures, it looks suspiciously like a *Space Invader*-shaped cab to me, but with Taito's own side art. However, the gameplay is identical and it has the Williams title screen, but runs on totally different board sets to normal.

My own first *Defender* was a horrible UK-licensed cab made by 'Streets' complete with spangly artwork all over it, a thin knobless steel joystick and a broken plastic control panel. I think I paid £100 for it back in '85 and the seller thought I was mad because he was about to put it in a skip. Later that same day I decided to have a crack at getting a million for the first time and it was sodding hard. During the game, at around 800,000, my various injuries were beginning to cause reflex problems as I had ripped my hand up on the broken edges, but ignored the blood as the adrenaline from getting to that point was suppressing the pain. This subsequently got infected, and after a trip to the docs, I coined the phrase '*Defender* finger'. Mind you, I also get '*Robotron* thumb', and 'track ball corns'.

I sold the spangly streets cab back in '98 to another games programmer, and eventually found a proper Williams *Defender* cab, albeit in real beat up shape, but working. It worked for 30 minutes after getting it home before the ancient monitor nearly burnt the cab to the ground!

Recently I decided to restore it before it disintegrates with the constant hammering it gets. I did the usual total strip down and rebuild, spread over many weeks, but this time the side art was stencil-sprayed by expert *Defender* restorer Phil at arcadetraders.com and he did an amazing job.

The Stencils he uses are standard *Defender* pattern red and yellow paint shapes. But last year I saw a *Defender* with some very unusual artwork on the side and front, featuring prominent *Star Wars*-style Tie fighters and X-wings on

"AFTER A TRIP TO THE DOCS, I COINED THE PHRASE 'DEFENDER FINGER'. MIND YOU, I ALSO 'GET ROBOTRON THUMB', AND 'TRACK BALL CORNS" ARCHER MACLEAN



» A spangly 1981 UK 'Streets' *Defender* cabinet.



» A close-up of my minty coin door.



» My treasured TAITO *Defender* original.

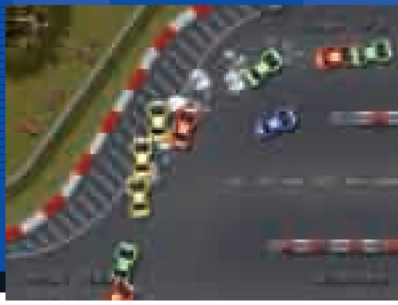
it. On further investigation it seems quite a few have shown up in Europe, more so than the USA. Legend has it that it's a prototype, and only half-a-dozen were made using this art and hastily shipped to Europe for a trade show. This was before lawyers from LucasArts had a word with Williams USA about the artwork, after which the artwork was changed to the yellow and red stencilled side art seen on all subsequent cabs. Either that, or the Williams USA guys quietly got rid of the USA prototypes by shipping them abroad.

Defender the game also inspired dozens of home computer clones. Some were perfect visual copies – such as *Planetoid* on the BBC – others like *Datastorm* were more loosely based on game structure. Over the years I've taken a fair bit of stick for *Dropzone* looking like *Defender* and *Stargate* because of the shoot-'em-up elements and scrolling landscape etc, but inspiration is not infringement, and it's obviously totally different code. I was immensely impressed with how the hell Eugene Jarvis managed to make so many graphic lumps fly all over the place, not realising at the time he had the advantage of early specialised graphics hardware, whilst I spent months trying to figure out how to make a plain old 6502 go fast enough to do something similar.

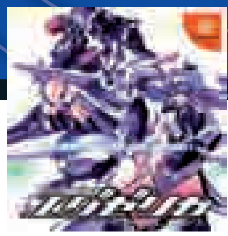
Dropzone is unusual because it started out on Atari home computers and went into an arcade game format in 1985, albeit in tiny numbers because the arcade market was imploding at the time the cab was commissioned. The arcade version had an extended title screen with a self demo-ing attract mode, coin slot logic and so on. The game difficulty ramped up faster after two minutes, as the operators wanted it to earn money and not provide a freebie challenge.

I intend to show some pics of Arcade *Dropzone* in a future article, as I have a real live full-sized version arcade version here at home, and anyone who's seen it does a double take!

ARCH



» It may not be massively 3D, but we're quite impressed by the number of cars that have been displayed. Now, if only someone would create an updated *Trampoline Gunmen* for the Dreamcast…



» With the NAOMI board still a viable medium in Japan, there are likely to be quite a few more DC shooters heading our way.

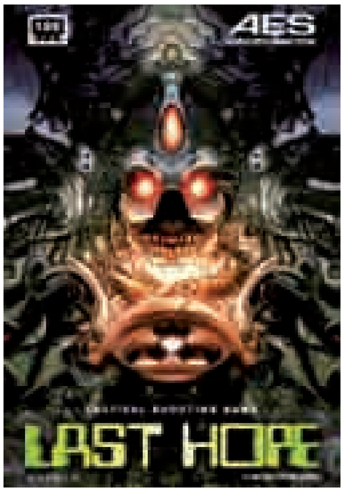
THE SOUL STILL BURNS

DREAMCAST TO RECEIVE FOUR NEW GAMES

Like the last remaining soldier manning the cannons to a castle besieged by barbarian hordes, fighting valiantly and refusing to capitulate no matter what the odds, the Dreamcast refuses to die. Within the space of a few months there have been four exciting new games announced.

The first is *Last Hope* which we featured in Issue 28, by German developer NG:DEV.TEAM, originally created for the Neo-Geo AES. It took six years to develop, but should now be available for the Dreamcast. Next is another shooter called *Trigger Heart Exelica* by Warashi of *Shienryu* fame. Originally a NAOMI arcade game, its Dreamcast port is due late February and features a unique weapon system where you capture enemies and swing them around your craft. Third is *Karous* on which there is little information. It's by Milestone and looks similar to its last shoot-'em-up *Radilgy*; although also cel-shaded, it has a much darker, art-house gothic styling. Videos show the gameplay as intense, with a reliance on close-up sword attacks. The Dreamcast port is planned for release this March.

Finally there is *Rush Rush Rally Racing* (*R4*) by home-brew developer Senile Team. As shown by the screens, it looks to be a traditional top-down racing game set over a variety of environments, and with cars able to perform jumps over ramps. Senile Team describes the game as "a true old-school racing game. No sponsored cars, no realistic environments – just plain old fun." The company is currently in talks regarding the game's possible publication by The Goat Store (www.goatstore.com), though currently there has been no confirmed release date for the title.



» For those who were put off by the price of the Neo-Geo version, the affordable Dreamcast release should prove a lot more palatable.

YOUR CHANCE TO WIN A NINTENDO DS PLUS COPIES OF CHILDREN OF MANA

MANA FROM NINTENDO

YOUR CHANCE TO **WIN** A SPANKING NEW **DS LITE!**



Retro Gamer has teamed up with Nintendo to bring you this exclusive competition, to coincide with the release of *Children Of Mana* on DS. We have a Nintendo DS Lite and a copy of *Children Of Mana* for the winner, plus five copies of the game for runners up. All you have to do to be in with a chance of winning one of these awesome prizes is answer the following simple question…

Before *Secret Of Mana* came out, a prequel was released. What is the official UK name of this game, and what system was it released on?

Correct entries will be collected together and placed in one of Darran's old socks, and then selected at random. Send your answers to us via email to retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk, or write to us at the usual address. All answers must be in by 20 February; the results will be printed in Issue 36. Good luck!



» Retro Gamer never tires of seeing exquisite hand-drawn cover art, and wishes more games featured it. Turn to page 85 for our full review on the game.



» You all remember the classic *Secret Of Mana*, right? The question is, can you remember the prequel that was released before it, and also what system it was on?

Terms and conditions: This competition is open to residents of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Nintendo has the right to substitute the prize for a similar item of equal or higher value. Employees of Imagine Publishing (including freelancers), their relatives or any agents are not eligible to enter. The editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash. Full terms and conditions are available on request. From time to time Imagine Publishing or its agents may send you related material or special offers. If you do not wish to receive this, please state clearly on your competition entry.

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



GRUNTILDA WINKYBUNION

VILLAINESS OF THE MONTH

Without a bad villain there would be no good heroes. What would the Ninja Turtles be without Shredder? What would Wolverine be without Sabertooth? Rubbish, that's what. This month: Gruntilda Winkybunion

First Appearance: *Banjo Kazooie*

Distinguishing Features: Green skin, malevolence

Weapon of Choice: The black arts

Most likely to: Kidnap Tooty the Bear

Least likely to: Appear in Oil Of Olay adverts

Unusual fact: Gruntilda has two sisters: named Mingella (tall, skinny) and Blobbelda (short, obese)

Retro Gamer DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING Retro Gamer — IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because Retro Gamer looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list.



FEBRUARY 07

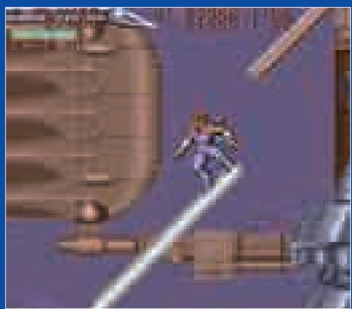
GAME ON

Starts: Now

Location: London Science Museum

Admission: £8.50 adults, £6.50 children

Okay guys, this is your final chance to grab a slice of gaming history. You've got until the end of February to visit London's Science Museum and then Game On is off to another location. Along with scheduled speakers from a great many gaming celebrities, you'll find a nostalgia-inducing range of classic arcade games and more consoles and computers than you can shake a joypad at. This is one event that you do not want to miss.



FEBRUARY 07

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION VOL 2

Released: 02 February

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £19.99

Format: PS2, Xbox

So then, Capcom's second PS2 and Xbox compilation contains all the games that featured on the first PSP compilation that hadn't been included on the first PS2 compilation, as well as all the games from the second PSP compilation that didn't already appear on the first PS2 compilation. Confused? Because we are. Still, here's a pic of *Strider*. Yay!



FEBRUARY 07

EA REPLAY

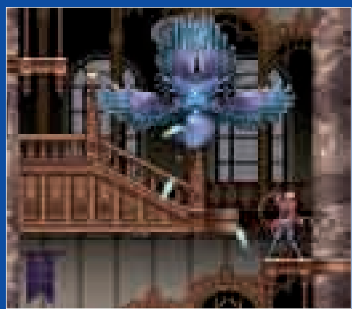
Released: 09 February

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Price: £34.99

Format: PS2, Xbox

It was only a matter of time before EA announced its first compilation. Boasting a wide variety of different genres, *EA Replay* is a decidedly mixed bag of games, and while it does feature a few classics, many computer owners will no doubt be disappointed with all the (often inferior) console ports that have been used. Oh, and that £35 price tag is absolutely shocking. Bad show EA.



FEBRUARY 07

CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

Released: 23 February

Publisher: Castlevania

Price: £29.99

Format: NDS

Hurrah! *Portrait of Ruin* is finally with us and while it's not quite as good as we were hoping for, it's bound to please fans of the series. Brimming with plenty of new ideas, some great looking visuals and a typically creepy soundtrack, *Portrait of Ruin* gives a good indication of what we can expect from future games. Check out our review on page 87.



MARCH 07

METAL SLUG ANTHOLOGY

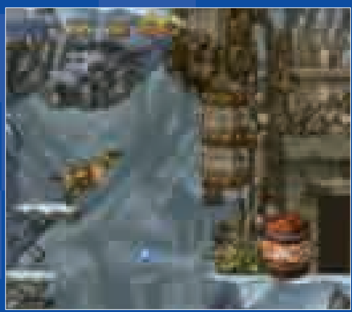
Released: 02 March

Publisher: Ignition

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, Wii

There's been a stunning array of retro compilations available on Sony's PSP and we're pleased to say that SNK Playmore's Metal Slug Anthology is another worthy addition to its ever-growing library. Granted, it's a little disappointing that the two Neo Geo Pocket Slugs haven't been included, but you certainly can't complain with what SNK is offering. Seven great run 'n' gun games for under £35. Bargain.



MARCH 07

METAL SLUG 1

Released: 23 March

Publisher: Ignition

Price: £29.99

Format: GBA

More *Metal Slug* shenanigans, but this time it's just the original game and it's being ported to Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. In the past we'd have been a little concerned about SNK's premier franchise heading to the GBA, but after witnessing the superb *Metal Slug Advance* we have no worries. Providing the gameplay matches the impressive visuals, this could well be one of the GBA's last hurrahs.



MARCH 07

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS DS

Released: March

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

As great as the original *Neo Geo Pocket Color* version was, we're expecting the DS outing to be even better – mainly due to the fact that it will be fully controlled using the stylus. It's unclear whether there will be two different versions, or if it will be a direct port of the original. Providing SNK Playmore don't mess around with the play mechanics too much, DS *Card Fighters* could be huge.



DECEMBER 07

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Released: December

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

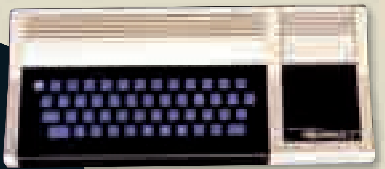
Aarrghh, it's gone and bloody slipped again! While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities and is already showing plenty of potential. Now that we've completed *Twilight Princess*, we were expecting *Phantom Hourglass* to plug the gap rather nicely, so it's a shame we going to have to wait a little longer.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1983



February 1983: a time when new home computers were released almost on a daily basis, new games were produced by one person in their bedroom, and existing systems started to infiltrate the shelves of high street stores. Oh, and Kajagoogoo topped the charts. Sadly.

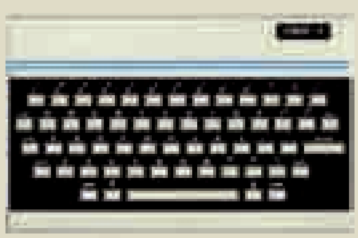


» This is the Age of Aquarius. Well, we're not convinced, we don't believe in horoscopes and astrology.

Mattel announced it would be entering the home computing market later in the year with its new system, the Aquarius. The machine, with its 4K RAM Z80 processor and slightly strange keyboard, promised nothing new to the plethora of existing systems, although Mattel did indicate that an impressive array of new add-ons and expansion packs would be available. Games would be on cassette or cartridge format, and the whole system would sell for a planned price of £139.

Future Aquarian delights to look forward to included a disc drive and a modem, which Mattel had the predictive foresight to reveal it could use for planned network services. Downloading games in 1983? Would Mattel's computer herald the new Age of Aquarius or would it have been better sticking to its game console, the Intellivision? Time would tell…

If the Aquarius was to succeed, it would have to take on the ever-increasing might of Sinclair Research. This month it revealed that it had sold over 200,000 Spectrum machines since launch. This is quite impressive when you consider that the first six months of that time was solely mail-order sales and that it was having considerable trouble keeping up with the orders with massive backlogs occurring.



» The Oric 1 found itself on shop shelves for the first time during February 1983. It was still there February 1989.

Sinclair forecast future sales of the Spectrum to hit 15,000 machines per week within the next few months. This prediction was, in no small part, helped by the news that most large branches of W H Smith would start stocking the machine from the beginning of February. It had been on sale in selected smaller stores, but because sales had been so overwhelming expansion was necessary. Smiths would also continue stocking the ZX81 as demand had continued unabated for the machine, and the firm also expanded its Sinclair software range to over 40 titles. Yes, 40 whole titles…

Oric International decided to follow Sinclair's lead into high street shops by agreeing to sell its Oric 1 machine in retail outlets, with W H Smith, again, being the principal stockist. Furthermore, it decided to completely cease selling via mail order.

While Sinclair seemingly soaked up every new user to the home computing market with its Spectrum, a few other companies were planning an assault on the Sinclair's territory. Texas Instruments announced it was set to release the TI99/2 within the next couple of months. The machine, which had more in common with the ZX81 than a Spectrum, looked to be woefully under-strength compared to new machines being released during this period. It had just 4KB RAM, no colour or sound and all for around £80? Seen as a backward step, the machine was essentially a stripped down version of the TI99/4A for computing newcomers, and although targeting beginners with an eye for a very basic starter machine, the ZX81 and Jupiter Ace both looked to be significantly better options.

Meanwhile, another big American company was trying to muscle in on the UK market with price reductions to its existing systems. Atari was set to reduce the price of its Atari 400 computer, bringing it down to a reasonable £160. Its bigger sister, the Atari 800, would remain with the heftier price tag of just under £400 although the RAM would be improved to 48KB from a rather mediocre 16KB.

Not to be left out, Sord, the Japanese computer manufacturer announced that its new machine, the Sord M5, was expected to hit British shores within the next few months. The Sord ran on a Zilog Z80 processor, had 20KB RAM and an 8KB ROM, which could be bumped up when the BASIC language cartridge was plugged in. It also had reasonable sound capabilities and a 16-colour palette, leading to expectations that it may be yet another challenger to Sinclair. CGL marketed the machine in the UK, but, when it finally arrived, it made very little impact on the already blossoming computing scene.

Still, the new systems kept coming with the news that Acorn Computers was ready to reveal its new micro, the Electron. It featured a very good keyboard backed up with a reasonable 32KB of memory. The machine was to launch with a proposed price tag of £199.

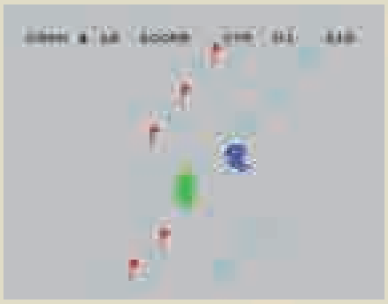
Being a trimmed-down version of the BBC Model B, the Electron would only be semi-compatible with the BBC micro's existing software. Marketed as a direct competitor to the Spectrum, it was interesting to see how the Electron



» The Sord M5, the first Japanese computer to be released and not bought by thousands of computing fans.



» The Acorn Electron was set in a case the colour of butterscotch Angel Delight. Didn't taste as nice though…





» *Horace Goes Skiing*, a game of two halves – one tarmacy, one snowy.

fared against a machine with an already substantial user base and enormous software selection.

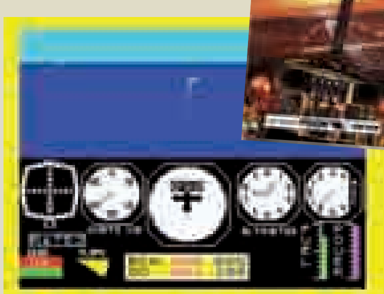
Psion, which produced many titles for Sinclair's own branded software range, released a second game in association with Melbourne House, the magnificent *Horace Goes Skiing* for 16K and 48K Spectrums. The game itself was simple: cross the busy road to the ski-hire shop (*Frogger* style), buy your skis and get back across the road for a spot of the Franz Klammers on the downhill skiing section. Horace also made appearances on other machines such as the Commodore 64 and Dragon 32.

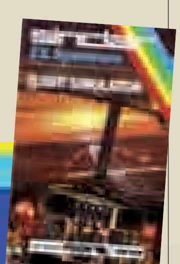
Psion, another company busy producing Sinclair branded software, had several new releases this month including *Flight Simulation* for the Spectrum and *Thro' The Wall* and *Super Glooper*, both for the ZX81.

Automata, creator of the Pi Man, announced a competition with a prize to blow the undercarriage right out of your trousers. The company's new game, *My Name Is Uncle Groucho, You Win A Fat Cigar*, found you attempting to uncover the identity of a mystery personality hidden away in this graphic puzzler. The game would be released on the Spectrum, the title, thankfully, shortened to just *Groucho*. However, the main lure of the game was the reward…

The first person to find the identity of the star would win a prize. They would fly by Concorde to New York, before been flown to a luxury hotel in Hollywood to meet the mystery star. They would then return to New York to stay in the Waldorf Astoria hotel before cruising home on the QE2. Oh, and there was £500 in cash to fritter away, too. Certainly better than an Automata t-shirt and Mel Croucher stick-on tache, we think you'll agree… And the identity of the mysterious star? Mickey Mouse.

Atari and Activision had a coming together when the mailing list for Atari's VCS Club magazine somehow found its way into the hands of Activision, producer of some very accomplished VCS cartridge games.

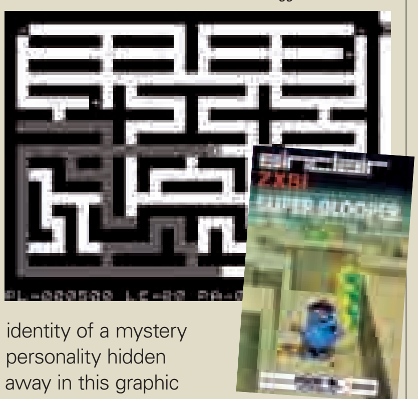




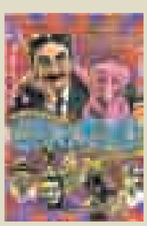
» Psion's flight simulation game, cunningly called *Flight Simulation*, was a massive hit back in 1983. A 'runway' success perhaps?



» **Left:** Psion's new release for the ZX81 was a bat-and-ball game, pretty much old hat even by 1983 standards.



» **Below:** *Pac-Man* again but with a hint of ZX81-ness. A great little game that also had a version of *Frogger* on side B.

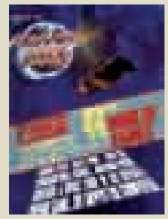




» Massive first prize, not very good game. Find the mystery star and win. Needless to say, it wasn't Toby Anstis…

THIS MONTH IN…

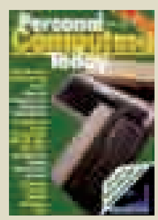
C&VG



The early days of C&VG saw a magazine stuffed with type-in games listings and ads. This month was no different with the bonus of a free 48-page games listing booklet. The adverts were the best bit and make for great retro reading.



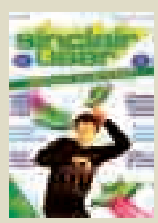
Personal Computing Today



The Sord M5 was the hardware review this month with a sneak preview of the machine before it launched later in the year. The Japanese computing invasion was coming apparently. Next up… MSX.



Sinclair User

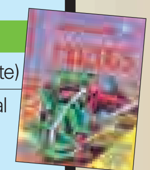


With a geeky looking fellow adorned with *Space Invaders* knitwear, the cheesy cover related to the 'Home Arcades – a new craze' feature inside. It focused on the early *Space Invader* clones available from software houses such as Quicksilva, Mikro-Gen and Bug-Byte.

CHARTS

FEBRUARY 1983

ZX81



1 Mazogs (Bug Byte)
2 The Black Crystal (Carnell Software)
3 3D Defender (J K Greye)
4 Winged Avenger (Workforce)
5 Football Manager (Addictive Games)

SPECTRUM



1 The Hobbit (Melbourne House)
2 Penetrator (Melbourne House)
3 Arcadia (Imagine)
4 Football Manager (Addictive Games)
5 Timegate (Quicksilva)

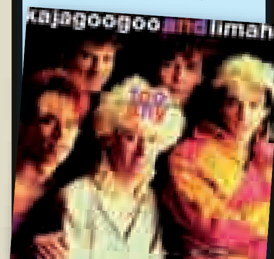
VIC 20



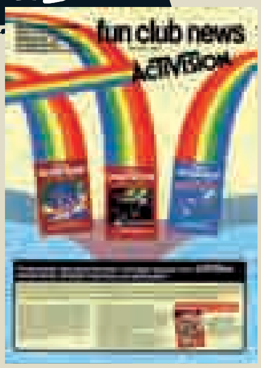
1 Gorf (Commodore)
2 Grid Runner (Llamasoft)
3 Traxx (Llamasoft)
4 Scramble (Rabbit Software)
5 Frog (Interceptor Software)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART DEC '86

1 Too Shy (Kajagoogoo)
2 Down Under (Men At Work)
3 Sign Of The Times (Belle Stars)
4 Change Tears For Fears)
5 Up Where We Belong (Joe Cocker & Jennifer Warnes)







» The front cover of Activision's Fun Club magazine – free to all Atari Club members via a bit of covert mailing-list shenanigans.

Activision also ran its own club and published its own magazine that, predictably, made its way through the letterbox of every Atari VCS Club member. Still, always nice to get something for nothing, and a spot of free advertising, albeit attained in a slightly cloak-and-dagger way, no doubt did wonders for Activision cartridge sales. Ethical? Nope. Pitfall? Yes please.

Flicking through the magazines of the day, Computer & Video Games, already up to issue 16, in those early computing times, hadn't yet introduced the Game Of The Month awards. In fact, there was a distinct lack of software reviews, with just a sprinkling of titles to occupy the readers' gaming curiosity.

Those featured, and achieving above average scores, were *Fantasy Games, Perilous Swamp & Sorcerer's Island* (Psion, ZX81), *Baja Buggies* (Gamestar, Atari 400/800) and a swathe of *Pac-Man* clones for Spectrum, *Spookyman* (Abbex), *Mazeman* (Abersoft) and *Gulpman* (Campbell Systems).

However, *Spookyman* fared the worst of the *Pac-Man* trio, which was rather surprising considering it was one of the first commercial games written by a certain Mr David M Webb, who later went on to program *Starion* for Melbourne House.

Melbourne House also announced that its new adventure game, *The Hobbit*, was ready for release under Sinclair's own software banner. Touted as one of the most complex Spectrum games ever released, expectation was high and it certainly didn't disappoint. It grabbed everyone's attention, shooting to number one in the Spectrum software chart. Not bad for a graphic adventure.

The Hobbit had apparently taken 18 months to program, which, considering the Spectrum had only been available for around half that time, was pretty good going. The reason behind this was that the game had been originally conceived and developed on the Tandy TRS-80.

Another freshly squeezed classic for the Sinclair Spectrum, released by Addictive Games by Kevin Toms was *Football Manager.* The game had already been on the market some months in the form of the ZX80/81 and TRS-80 versions. The ZX version had sold particularly well, so the progression to the Spectrum was a natural one. The most interesting addition to this version was the "3D" graphics that featured small UDG stick-men players and a goal the size of a power station in the match highlights. However, it did add to the game immensely.

Strangely, for a while several people insisted you could control the players with the keyboard, not believing the highlights were randomly generated through your team selections. No, instead the instructions were supposedly incomplete… 'Come on, Keegan, shoot man, shoot!' I bloodly pressed the kick key and he spooned it past that (75-foot high) goal…

» Like little, green upside-down faces speeding through the sand, Gamestar's *Baja Buggies* was a great little racer for the Atari.





» One half of the Fantasy Games compilation, *Sorcerer's Island* was a worthy addition to your ZX81 games collection.

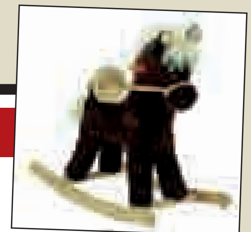




» *Pac-Man* was the flavour of the month with no less than three Spectrum conversions released.

1987

NEWS FEBRUARY 1983



» Shergar, the ultimate racehorse, looks in fine fettle after a day of grooming with the Fisher Price Horsey Set.

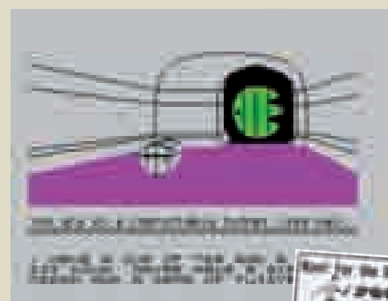
On the evening of 8 February, Shergar, one of the nation's favourite racehorses, was kidnapped from his stables in County Kildare. Shergar, being a prize stallion, was in readiness for the forthcoming breeding season, due to begin just one week on. An initial ransom of £2 million was demanded but was dropped significantly as the days went by. Shareholders in Shergar refused to pay any ransom, believing it would encourage further kidnappings. Shergar was never found, and the kidnapper's identity remains a mystery, although the IRA was widely believed to be responsible.

Singer, Karen Carpenter died on 4 February due to a heart attack brought on from the strains of battling eating disorder anorexia. She was 32.

10 February saw a huge police investigation launched after a blockage in a drain, outside a house in Muswell Hill, London, was identified as human flesh. Police searched the house and found two human heads inside the property. The owner, civil servant Dennis Nielsen, was charged with the murder of homeless man Stephen Sinclair whose remains were identified as those in the drain. Searches of the nearby area found additional remains and Nielsen later admitted to a further 15 murders although he was eventually tried and found guilty on 12 charges of murder. He received six life sentences.



» Karen Carpenter looks like she is trying to Call Occupants of Interplanetary Craft.



» **Above:** A familiar screen to thousands of *Hobbit*-owning (that's the game not the creature) fans. Open chest. Empty. Pah!



» **Below and right:** An all-time classic is born. Prepare yourselves for the face of beardiness and umpteen format releases in the coming months.



ALIEN VS PREDATOR

YOU GOT TIME TO DUCK?



- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ (PCB BOARD)

HISTORY



This is how the film should have been, featuring Dutch Schaefer from the first *Predator* film, along with his arch nemesis and a whole bunch of aliens, all of them fighting, all of the time. Not, as it turned out having, a pathetic bunch of weak overly emotional people, running around an Aztec pyramid underneath Antarctica. Imagine if the film was directly based on the game, instead of loosely on the source material, it would have been the greatest game-to-film conversion ever! A film doesn't need lengthy dialogue or poignant scenes of vulnerability to be great – just look at *Bloodsport*, with a different name it could almost be the perfect film conversion of *Street Fighter II*.

Apologies about the film rant, but we've been playing *Alien Vs Predator* two-player in the office recently, and it reminded us that 1) The film really was utter tripe, and 2) this Capcom arcade brawler is still as fantastic as it was back in 1994. It's so good in fact, there was a distinct air of childlike giddiness in our bowler hats at the time. I'll be honest and admit it was on MAME, mainly since I cannot continue to live a lie and say we actually travel hundreds of miles to an arcade still running it. Get over it people, MAME is the easiest and, for some people, the only way to enjoy the intense action of games like *AVP*.

MAME might be the only way to play it, since Capcom no longer owns the licensing rights to release it in a retro compilation. Can you believe that? Apart from paying for a super-rare CPS2 board, which will commit suicide after a certain time thereby rendering your purchase useless, the only other way to play it is by breaking the law!* There will come a day (a long time from now) when all the boards are dead, and then everyone will be forced to commit crime. We like this criminally dystopian vision of the future.

If the massive screen to the right hasn't forced you to seek out this game, then there's something wrong with it. Just look at it. It's got big, bold and blow-up-able action, plus it's the perfect homage to one of the Eighties' perfect films. Stop reading this and go play it. Now.

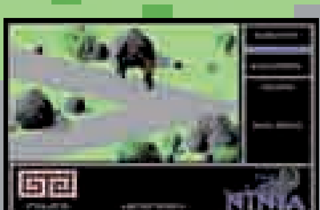
**Retro Gamer* does not condone the downloading of ROMS.*



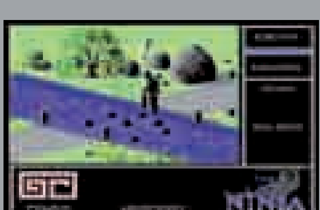

2P
Maj. Schaefer
安全

THE MAKING OF... LAST NINJA

Forget the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: if you wanted to engage in hardcore martial arts action System 3's Last Ninja trilogy was the top choice. David Crookes talks to creators Mark Cale and John Twiddy – and discovers why the game almost killed the company.



» Combat is often and frantic in *Last Ninja* meaning that you'll be constantly on your toes



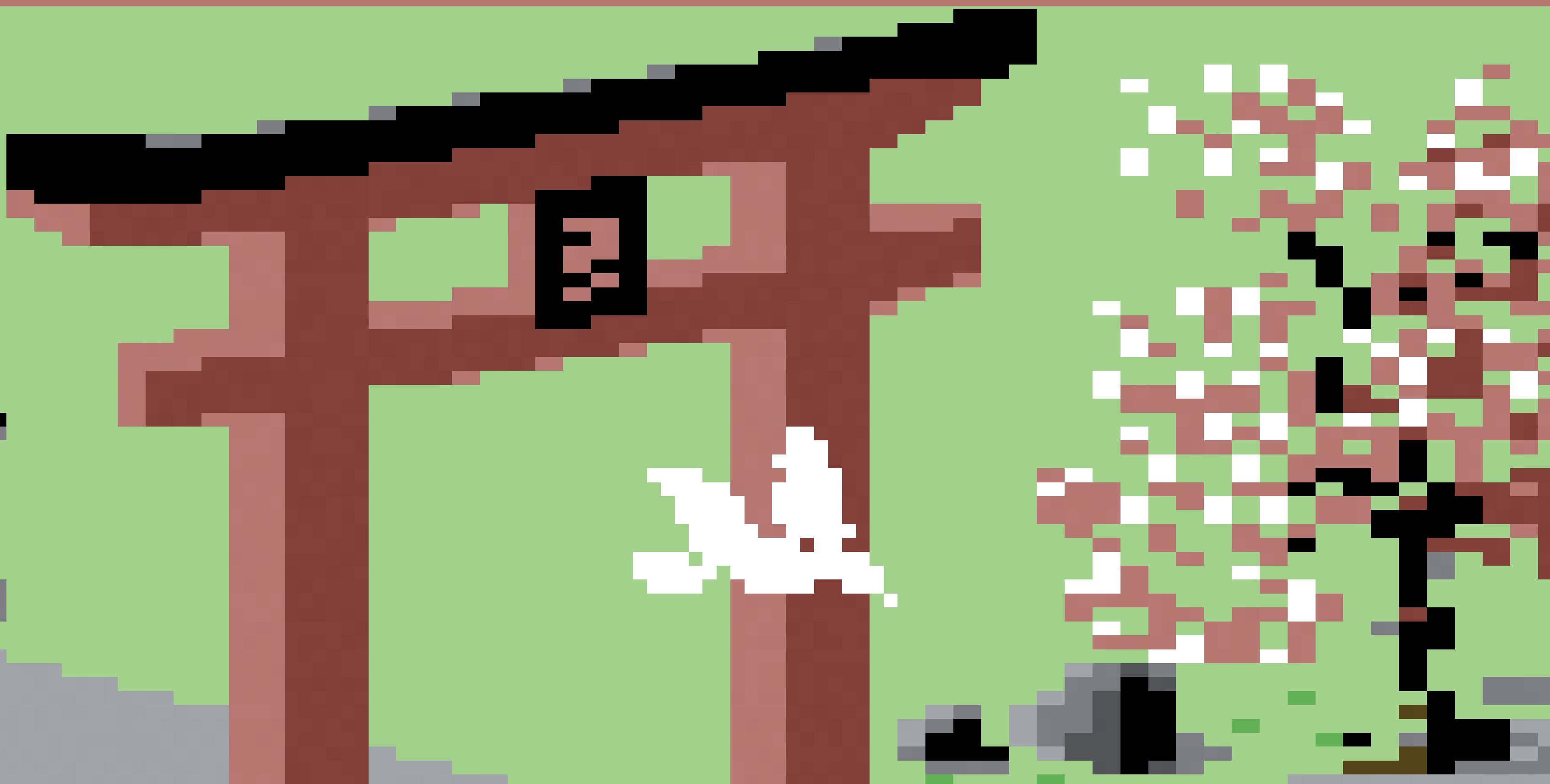
» Despite the graphical power of the C64, System 3 did a great job of capturing the spirit of feudal Japan

Many things can be said about *Last Ninja*: it was a revelation, a masterpiece, a landmark videogame of the mid-Eighties. Yet for Mark Cale, boss of System 3, it was something of a nightmare. Trying to get it made was as difficult as playing cards in a wind tunnel – and it nearly tore his company apart.

At the end of 1985, Cale had devised a concept for an isometric-viewed game that would involve a ninja as the lead character, many puzzles to solve and lots of bad ass to kick. All well and good except for one niggling little problem. Having an isometric view with hi-res graphics and top-quality animation on a Commodore 64, given the tiny amount of memory, was proving impossible and it was causing much consternation at System 3. "People actually left the firm," says Cale, thinking back to the period in which he insisted his idea for *Last Ninja* could work. "They said the game could not be done. We had a major split with half of the staff believing it was possible and the other half feeling we were pushing things too far. The disbelief at what I wanted to achieve was incredible."

Cale, however, was stubborn enough to plough on regardless, and throughout 1986 he continued to look for a solution. He had become enough of a realist to know that whatever he did, there would be someone who would grumble anyway so he refused to let the idea go. Having been inspired by Atari's *Adventure* – a game considered to be the first ever action-adventurer – for the 2600 in 1978, something inside him was burning. "I had basically wanted to create an action-adventure game for quite a few years. I'd played *Adventure* and was fascinated by it," he says. "Many such games were text-based and when I played an adventure title by the likes of Scott Adams [creator of many text-based adventures in the late-Seventies and early-Eighties] or many by Infocom, I just didn't like them.

I felt *Adventure*, even though the graphics were limited, was excellent in comparison to other 2600 games. It opened adventuring up and that's what inspired me with *Last Ninja*." And so he set to work. First of all, he drew up a storyboard detailing every screen that would eventually be created while devising the puzzles and placing them around his new world. He decided on an isometric viewpoint. "We were obviously unable to



do full 3D and it was easier and better to use isometric which gave a kind of false 3D effect," he says. And although the game involved a ninja, he did not want it to be over in a flurry of kicks and punches. The puzzling elements, he mused, were vital, and so he tried to make them logical and realistic while pacing the game with just the right amount of action.

"As people do now, I used a storyboard to map out the screens as an isometric road on which I placed puzzles and obstacles," says Cale. "Back then though, storyboards were rare. Programmers tended to jump straight into programming, tinkering with the code to make their routines look good, so storyboarding was pioneering in that sense. But it meant I could have an overall view of where the game was heading and I could devise the puzzles. For example, in the Wastelands – the first level of *Last Ninja* – we needed some scope to be able to put the dragon to sleep. So we built the puzzles around that premise, having the character collect smoke bombs from behind a rock earlier in the level and then getting the player to work out that he needed to throw them at the dragon."



» Few would have guessed that the constant exploration in *The Last Ninja* was inspired by the Atari 2600 hit *Adventure.*

The ninja theme was decided early in the game's development in a bid to tie the game into current trends of the mid-Eighties. At that time, ninjas were in vogue. Bruce Lee was an influential figure sparking the first major surge of interest in Chinese martial arts in the West, having taken the leading role in five major films including *The Big Boss, Fist Of Fury, Way Of The Dragon, Enter The Dragon* and *Game Of Death* in the late-Seventies. That influence continued into the Eighties, depicting ninjas as well-trained assassins and martial artists, wearing black head-to-toe suits. *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* took the genre to the kids as the decade progressed.

Still, there remained some unease about ninjas. In Britain, the cartoon characters became the Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles and nunchuks were cut from the films. To have a vengeful time-travelling ninja as the protagonist in *Last Ninja* could very easily have been seen as provocative. Not so, says Cale. "*Last Ninja* was not created as a controversial game. There was just a large following of hero-type characters back then and martial arts was big. Ninjas were mysterious and very popular and it worked very well in the Eighties. It wouldn't work as a new concept now because people seem to like shooting rather than such close-quarters combat, so if I was creating this game from scratch now as a brand new licence it would probably have a space theme because sci-fi is the big thing at the moment. I think that's why we see games like *Halo* set in space."

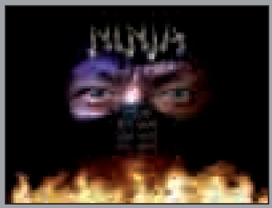
Cale asked Bob Stevenson to create the concept art for *Last Ninja* while Hugh Riley drew the graphics. Cale then set about finding a programming team to pull the game together, but the combination of the isometric viewpoint, hi-res graphics and animation was proving too much of an obstacle. Two programming teams tried to pull it off but ultimately failed. It caused some sleepless nights yet Cale

"THEY SAID LAST NINJA COULD NOT BE DONE. HALF THE STAFF BELIEVED IT WAS POSSIBLE; THE OTHER HALF FELT WE WERE PUSHING IT TOO FAR. THE DISBELIEF AT WHAT I WANTED TO ACHIEVE WAS INCREDIBLE"



» (Above and below) System 3 has kindly provided exclusive shots of *The Last Ninja* series on PSP.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SYSTEM 3/ACTIVISION/SUPERIOR SOFTWARE

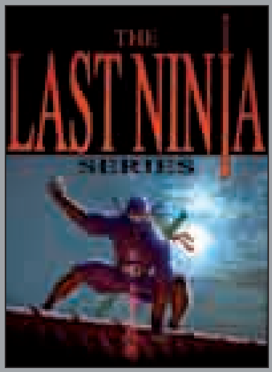
» **DEVELOPER:** SYSTEM 3

» **RELEASED:** 1987

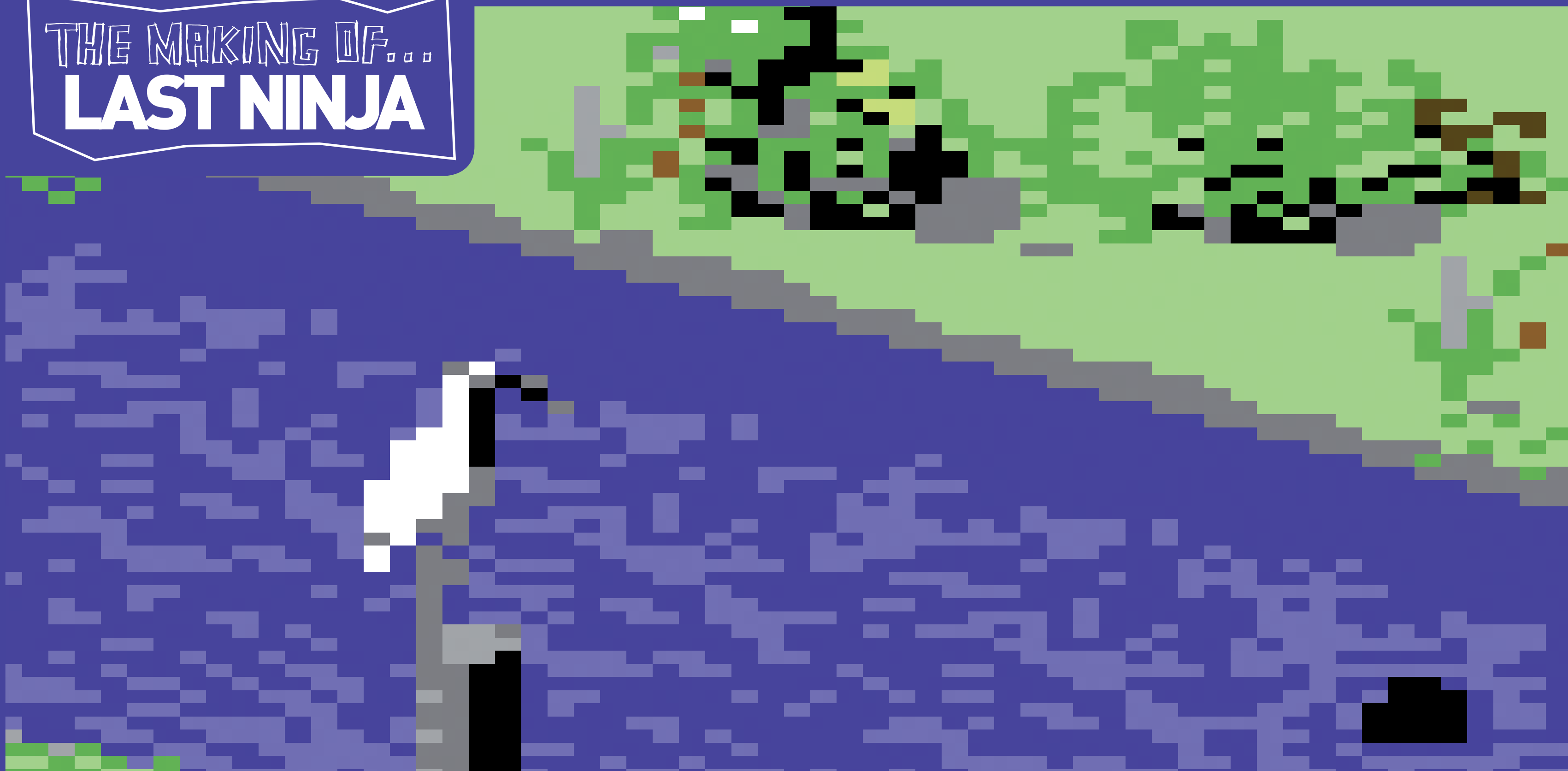
» **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE

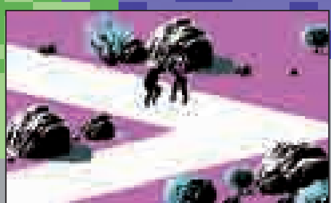
» **FORMATS:** COMMODORE 64 (SYSTEM 3) APPLE IIGS, ATARI ST, MS-DOS (ACTIVISION) BBC MICRO/ACORN ELECTRON, ACORN ARCHIMEDES (SUPERIOR SOFTWARE), AMIGA (AS LAST NINJA REMIX)

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3-£5

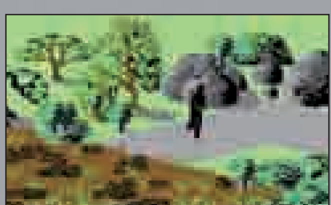


LAST NINJA





» The DOS version may not have been pretty to look at but the excellent gameplay was still intact.



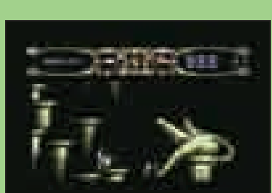
» The Last Ninja is filled with a variety of different environments. Here's the beginning of a fetid swamp.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DEATH STAR INTERCEPTOR
SYSTEMS: COMMODORE64, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

BANGKOK NIGHTS
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST, COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1987

MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMIGA CD32, AMSTRAD, COMMODORE 64, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1989



was adamant the game would be made. He decided to give a third development team the chance to get it right. And then John Twiddy arrived.

"The idea would never have got off the ground were it not for John Twiddy," says Cale, gushing about the man he has now worked with – on and off – for more than 20 years. Twiddy had produced the Expert Cartridge for the C64, a device that allowed programs to be frozen, backed up and analysed, and he had also created a protection system called Cyberload which bore the infamous message "hackers f*ck off and die" in the memory. He seemed the perfect man to solve the technological problems and Cale got him on board for *Last Ninja*. "I was living up in Newcastle when I got a call from Mark to go to London and see System 3," says Twiddy. "I saw the idea for *Last Ninja* and I was blown away by the quality of the graphics which had been created by Hugh Riley. Hugh had created thousands of sprite animations using Steve Beat's sprite editor, and he had them doing all kinds of wonderful sequences of oriental fighting moves with all manner of weapons. He had also created some stunning backgrounds. It was a wonderful opportunity to be able to start a project when a lot of graphics have already been created, because it allows you to pick and choose the ones that work best. In fact this was one of the major problems – there were probably ten times more sprite graphics than could be used and therefore one of my first tasks was to decide what moves and weapons the player should be limited to and how to fit them together in a consistent way, in order to get them into the C64's memory."

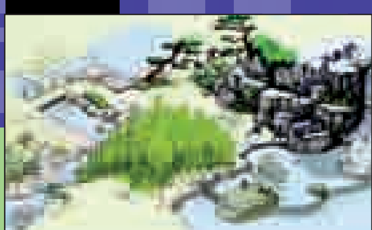
Cale already had a program called Integrator that had been created by a Hungarian scientist called Istvan Bodnar, the person responsible for the 3D isometric viewpoint. Integrator had managed to fit the hi-res graphics and animation into 128KB. Twiddy used this as the basis to solving the problem, and he worked on ways to refine the program so that the elements of the game would fit in half of that memory.

It was decided that each level – made up of between 15 and 25 screens – would be drawn using hi-res objects. These individual elements were stored in the C64's memory and drawn to the screen when required. It meant the computer only had to store one type of tree, for instance, replicating it many times across various screens, thus saving memory. Twiddy says: "This method was a very innovative one, which is one of the reasons the game received so much critical acclaim. Unfortunately the Integrator was painstakingly slow, taking a minute or two to step through each object just so you could move an object left or right a square or two. So to stop Hugh going mad, my next task was to improve the Integrator, allowing flipping and recolouring of objects and easier editing. Up till this point, the intention had always been that the backgrounds would not have any real 3D to them, hence why no objects were ever put in the foreground. This seemed such a pity that I spent a lot of time working out a way to allow the ninja and opponents to be masked by the objects he passed under."

To further cut down on the system's resources, Twiddy decided to tweak the system so that it restricted the boundaries within which the player could operate. The lead character was therefore forced to

"WE GAVE AWAY A ROCK-HARD RUBBER STAR TO TAKE OUT SOME KID'S EYE. STILL, I WAS PLEASED WITH THE GAME'S RECEPTION. IT WAS THE FIRST EUROPEAN GAME THAT PEOPLE QUEUED UP FOR. IT WAS THAT POPULAR"





» Just a small example of the amount of work being put into the new versions of *The Last Ninja* series.

stick to the paths and could not walk on the grass. "This was done by using series of joined vector lines, and the program would detect whether you had crossed a line to see whether he was allowed to move," says Twiddy. "This line crossing was then used to trigger events such as falling into water, awakening dragons and so on." Although extremely restrictive from the point of view of today's free-roaming adventures, it enabled the game to be made. Breakthrough. "Twiddy worked on that game for 24 hours a day in my apartment," Cale laughs. "I was that hands-on that I wanted to see the game come together. We got the whole thing done in two months, which is remarkable when you think the sequels took three times as long. We worked on it day and night. Everyone on that game lived and worked and drank *Last Ninja* together. We were a hundred per cent committed since we just we wanted the job done. We'd finally discovered we could do it so we wanted to get it finished. We were on a roll."

That's not to say that the game was being rushed. "I'd been working on it for two years," says Cale, "conceiving the game at the end of 1985 and releasing it in 1987 so we weren't acting in haste," he says. "We were just so enthusiastic. Twiddy's job was made easier since we had all of the bits – the graphics and animation – we needed for the game and he just needed to put it together." As the game progressed tweaks were made, but the isometric graphics Cale wanted were all there, as was the mix of combat and puzzle solving. For the 12 people who have not played *Last Ninja*, the gamer assumed the role of Aemakuni whose aim was to infiltrate the fortress of the evil shogun, Kunitoki, in order to avenge the deaths of his fellow clan members. Walking through a set of six distinct levels – The Wastelands, The Wilderness, Palace Gardens, The Dungeons, The Palace, The Inner Sanctum – the game culminated in a showdown with Kunitoki.

"We had these distinct sections for a reason," explains Cale. "You need a different look and feel after each load. Let's face it, if you've been waiting 20 minutes you want the next part to look special." He added: "For me, we had the



» An indication of just how fluid the animation will be in the upcoming *The Last Ninja* series.



» More concept art from *The Last Ninja* series suggesting that our hero will be far nimbler than in his C64 outings.



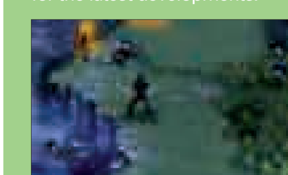
» The Spectrum version of *The Last Ninja 2* received an impressive 90% in Crash magazine and a deserved 'Smash'.

NINJA LIVES ON

The Last Ninja is set for another outing this year. System 3 is working on three prime launches: Epyx's *Impossible Mission*, in March; *California Games*, in June; and *The Last Ninja*, in the autumn, all for PlayStation Portable, Nintendo DS, and Wii. The first three *Last Ninja* games will be remade for the new formats.

"We're going to keep the isometric and update the inertia, speed of character, and audio," says Cale. "Essentially, though, the games will remain the same. Old games were playable because there was very little else they could rely on." System 3 will then concentrate on producing *The Last Ninja 4* at long last. Previous attempts to bring it to market have failed, largely due to the company being let down at the 11th hour by major console manufacturers. But Cale has persevered and, while he is keeping many of the elements of *The Last Ninja 4* under wraps, it is understood that the isometric viewpoint and the theme will remain similar to the first three games. The graphics, audio and gameplay will be thrust into the 21st Century.

Keep reading **Retro Gamer** for the latest developments.

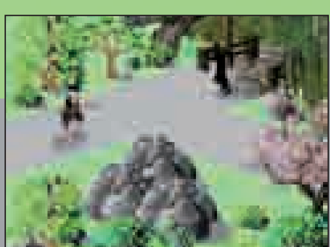


» Whilst not in-game, these visuals should give you a good indication of the final look.

LAST NINJA



» Wasn't it a big, bad troll that used to live under a bridge?



» As with the new *Impossible Mission*, there will be the option to mix new characters with old backgrounds.

elements of a text adventure pinned to graphics. In a sense, we tried to make up for the lack of graphical prowess of Atari's *Adventure* by creating a game with state-of-the-art graphics, even if that did cause us problems. We had a solid story, great backgrounds and animation, and it was no wonder it did so well." The game went on to sell 4 million copies on C64 alone. But although the game was extremely well received by the punters, there were some frustrations as the magazine reviewers were only to keen to point out.

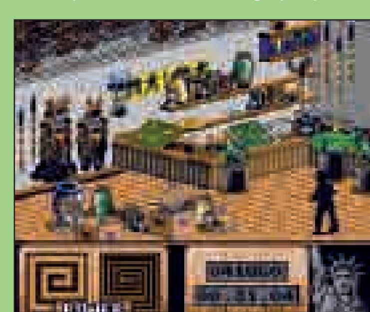
During the tweaking of the game as part of the development process, Twiddy decided that the character's progression was too easy so he decided to throw in a few obstacles to make the game more of a challenge. Cale says: "Before John got started, we had this good idea of what we wanted to do and we had come up with the idea of the ninjas and the puzzles and so on. We presented it all to Twiddy and he knew we needed to create the game. But he felt something wasn't right so he introduced parts of the game in which the ninja had to cross rivers or swamps by jumping onto the stones.

We had some big arguments about this," recalls Cale, "but John was insistent it was the right thing to do. I felt it was the weakest element in the game. The problem was, this part was pixel perfect. If you mistimed the jump you plunged to your death. In hindsight, something else should have been done. I should have made the decision not to include it. At times, some things look good on paper, others don't. John refused to change it, it was picked up in reviews and now… well, as he has said, 'I do concede that you were correct'."

Although the punters were left frustrated at the river and swamp parts, they were more than amazed at the quality of the audio. The amazing music had been created by Ben Daglish and Anthony Lees. Cale had known about Daglish's talents from the work he had done with Ocean. Lees however, was a bit more of an unknown. A talented musician, he was still a teenager when he created music for *Last Ninja*. He was, a "fantastic find," says Cale. "The music he created was phenomenal when you consider he was only 16 or 17 at the time. Lees was actually a chance find through people we



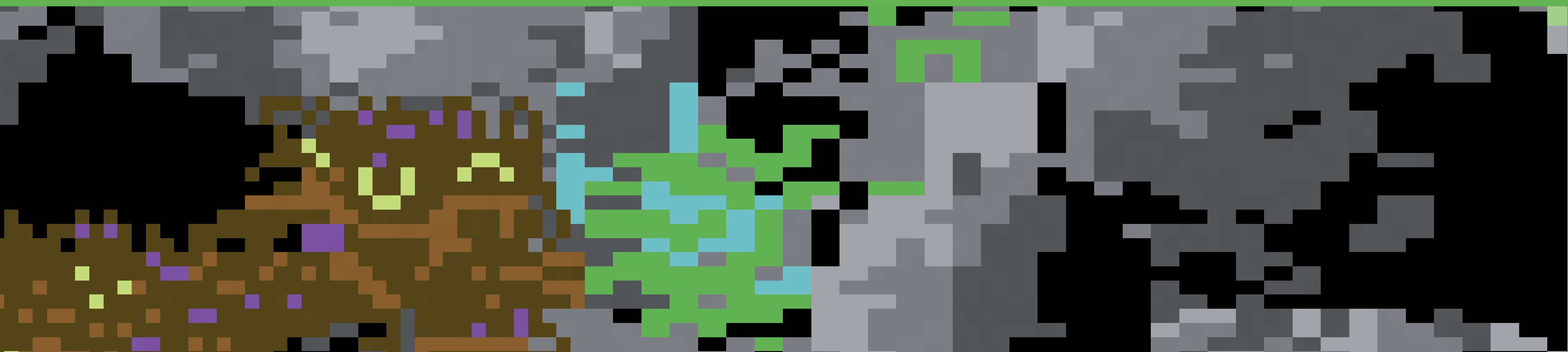
» Huge giant crabs are proving quite popular in videogames at the moment…



» The Amiga version of *Last Ninja 2: Back With A Vengeance* in all its 16-bit glory.

RETRO GENIUS

System 3 boss Mark Cale says he feels more skill was involved in creating games during the Eighties. And *The Last Ninja*, he believes, illustrates that perfectly, particularly since it was created despite having just 64KB to play around with on the 8-bit Commodore. "The graphics on *Last Ninja* were restricted," he says. "People take graphics for granted now, but to get the processes to work back then, programmers had to work in machine code. The computers had different chip sets for sound, graphics and so on which was difficult to program, and to do it effectively meant programmers often turned to machine code. When you look at the situation now, everyone works in C++ which is less challenging in my view. It shows how special these guys were. To do what they did was technically superb."



knew, and we were thrilled to have him on board. *Last Ninja* was his first musical score and it was very good indeed."

Cale showed Daglish and Lees both the graphics and the way the game was progressing, briefing them fully on the atmosphere he wanted from the game. But he insists that is where his influence stopped. "Every note of music was created by Daglish and Lees," he said. "They had free reign to write whatever they wanted. When I look back, the dungeon music in particular had a lot of atmosphere. And if you ask me who was the best out of the pair… well, I'd say both. They were simply outstanding."

It was the last time Mark Cale worked with Daglish, however. He brought composer Matt Gray on board for *Last Ninja 2*, the inevitable sequel, and stuck with Lees on other projects. Gray created the entire soundtrack for *Last Ninja 2* and later went on to partly write Cher's 1998 song, *Believe*.

Last Ninja 2 was slightly different from the original, and was released in 1988. Whereas the debut was set in the past, the second game in the series was firmly in the present – New York to be exact, Kunitoki having teleported the lead ninja through time. It had better graphics and smoother animation. The puzzles were expanded and included switches and such like and there were some neat tricks – the cops could shoot you dead with a single bullet. Twiddy says: "I was keen to start work on *Last Ninja 2* since it allowed me to put into action many of the ideas I had wanted to implement in *Ninja 1*. We took more time and effort in planning out the levels and puzzles and that is the reason why *Ninja 2*, in my opinion, was more playable."



» More *Last Ninja 2* love, this time the intrepid hero has managed to infiltrate Nintendo's NES.



» So new, yet oh so familiar. Roll on Autumn.



» What's better than playing *Last Ninja* in front of the TV? Playing it on the move of course.

Controversially, *Last Ninja 2: Back With A Vengeance* came in two packs: a standard release and one containing a throwing star and ninja mask along with a map and handbook. It caused uproar, not least by the bosses of Boots who promptly swept it from their shelves. "Okay, we'd never get away with it now," laughs Cale. "Here we were giving away a rock-hard rubber star to take out some kid's eye. Other than that, I was very pleased with the game's reception. It was the first European game that people queued up for. It was that popular."

It was not long before *Last Ninja 3: Real Hatred Is Timeless* was released. It followed the release of *Last Ninja Remix* which reworked *Last Ninja 2* for the 8-bits and was a version of the first game for the 16-bits. This time, however, John Twiddy decided not to continue. The game was instead handed to a new development team, with the main programmer being Stan Schembri and it hit the shelves in 1991. The visuals were the best yet and the game was set in the future. Although it harked back to the gameplay of the first, there were some nice additions, not least the ability to use your enemy's weapon against your opponents. *Zzap!64* awarded it 93 per cent; Your Commodore gave it a staggering 100 per cent.

Cale says: "Twiddy felt that he had created enough ninja projects in his life and wanted to do something else. Even now, I say to him that he should have carried on with it. He could have created an entire series. But with *Last Ninja 3* we had someone who wanted to recreate the game in his own way. And, to be honest, there were a lot of arguments. I wanted Twiddy's 3D routines since I felt the new team's was not as strong. The graphics looked great, but they were not oriental since it was set in the future. There was more of a dungeon and underworld theme and, for me, it didn't feel as good. I can't explain why; I just felt that if it wasn't broke, why fix it? Yet I can see why things change. The new team just didn't want to be in Twiddy's shadow and, after all, we sold 1.5 million copies of *Last Ninja 3* which is fine."

Proposals for *Last Ninja 4* came and went. John Wells created a map for one of the levels in 1993, but it was turned down by System 3. Six years later, Cale decided to have another shot, and the game was eventually pencilled in for 2004, having been shown at E3 in Los Angeles in 2003. Those plans were dropped. A revival is scheduled however; *Last Ninja* will live on (see Ninja Lives On, page 21).

So how does Mark Cale feel about the *Last Ninja* series in hindsight? "At first we had problems, but then if you have poor technicians, your ideas never work. Yet we persevered and were among the first to put whole themes and stories into games not just waves of aliens. At that time, many games were just shoot-'em-ups or racing or platform games. I think the thing *Last Ninja* created was legacy. Look around today. Look at Lara Croft. Core told us that part of the inspiration for *Tomb Raider* was *Last Ninja*. Those foundations were laid in 1985 and, to be honest, I'm very proud."



» It's a brand new look but it's easy to tell that the spirit of the original games has been captured.

COMMODORE 64

System 3's preferred computer was the Commodore 64, a machine on which *The Last Ninja* made its debut. But why Commodore 64? "Well, it was so successful," says Cale. "Xbox may have sold around 6 million machines, but C64 sold 20 million in a smaller, more restrictive industry. It was a great computer with wonderful technology – the SID chip was fantastic – and we had lots of success on it. "We were very loyal to the computer. That was our market and it was a different world from Nintendo and the NES where everything had to be licensed by a Japanese company. And Commodore 64 enabled us to gain success in the States, a market upon which we focused. After all, we were the first European company to get a Billboard number one in the US."



THE CLASSIC GAME



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

Hell hath no fury like an ape denied his precious banana hoard. Retro Gamer dons its smartest tie, takes a ride on the back of a rampaging rhinoceros, and prepares to revisit one of the SNES's classiest platformers.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+ 800 POINTS (ROUGHLY £6 ON THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE)



» Capture three gold animal icons on your travels and you'll instantly be transported to a bonus stage. Your reward? The chance to earn plenty of extra lives.

What do you do when you've just been given access to the latest Silicon Graphics technology, have the protective wing of Nintendo nurturing you, and have gained access to one of the company's most important IPs? For Rare it was simple: you bring back Miyamoto's legendary simian, Donkey Kong.

It's difficult to believe now, in this age of bongo games and constant *Mario Parties*, but before *Donkey Kong Country* appeared on Nintendo's SNES, the large primate hadn't starred in his own videogame for a whole decade. Okay, so he'd had cameos in various Nintendo titles during those wilderness years, but that was as far as it went; the *Donkey Kong* licence seemed consigned to the history bins.

Absence may well make the heart grow fonder, but it's arguable that one of the main reasons for *Donkey Kong Country*'s amazing success – it sold a staggering 8 million units and spawned two sequels – was that it looked like no other SNES game before it. Revealed to the unsuspecting attendees of the 1994 Summer Consumer Electronics Show (SCES) in 1994, many assumed *Donkey Kong Country* to be Rare's first game for Nintendo's incoming Nintendo 64. Unsurprising, really, as Rare had already announced that it would be working on the machine exclusively for Nintendo earlier that year. Needless to say, the audience was blown away when it was revealed that Rare's new game was, in fact, running on a humble SNES. It became an instant critical and commercial success when it launched several months later in November.

Donkey Kong Country's superlative visuals had materialised while Rare had been working on the new Silicon Graphics workstations that had been purchased for them by Nintendo. It had discovered a method of converting amazing graphical routines – everything from silky smooth animation, impressive light sourcing and photorealistic graphics – into Nintendo's 16-bit console, and the results were staggering.

From the instant Donkey Kong sprung from his tree house home and started to

make his way through the sumptuously detailed jungle, the visuals never failed to impress. Snow-capped mountain tops, foreboding mines, crystal-imbedded caverns and ancient ruins may be traditional fare for platformers nowadays, but seldom had they been captured so perfectly – and certainly not on a SNES or any other 16-bit machine at the time.

Even today, *DKC*'s glorious looking environments continue to impress, and it's testament to Rare's technical prowess that it remains just as enchanting to look at some 13 years later. Throw in a sugary sweet soundtrack that slyly mimicked the music from the original game – most noticeable in the amusing intro – and you had a title that sounded just as good as it looked.

Of course, it's all very well having a game that's aesthetically polished to perfection, but it matters not one jot if there's no sterling gameplay to back it up. No such worries with *Donkey Kong Country*. Initially controlling just Donkey Kong, you soon discovered new character Diddy hiding in a nearby barrel. Once freed, he opened up a whole new level of strategy as you could now use both primates to negotiate the sections of each level that they were most suited to. A quick button press saw the two simians slapping hands and swapping places with each other meaning that Donkey could deal with the bigger, more dangerous enemies (Diddy's small size means he's more limited to who he can bounce upon) while Diddy could use his extra speed to reach tricky, out-of-the-way platforms. It's a great play mechanic that sits nicely with the pair's more traditional bottom-bouncing and rope-climbing moves. There was even a co-op mode to enjoy although it was fairly limited as it didn't allow you to control both characters at the same time (the player would gain control whenever the primates tagged each other).

Although Donkey and Diddy worked perfectly well as a team, Rare had also included a number of animal helpers that made it far easier for the pair to traverse certain, otherwise impassable sections of the games. Rambi the rhinoceros could use his huge strength to break through secret walls, Engarde the swordfish had a devastating dash attack and there was even an ostrich called Expresso who could fly for very limited distances. Throw in plenty of secret routes, bonus rounds and hidden objects to discover and *Donkey Kong*'s vibrant world became a platform fan's wet dream – it was essentially a huge enticing playground of opportunity that had to have every last inch of it explored.

Rare may have been given plenty of freedom with the *Kong* franchise, but it knew that it would have to feature as many elements from the original game in order to make it instantly recognisable to anyone with only the vaguest memory of the original *Donkey Kong* – don't forget, the ape had been away for a good ten years. While Mario himself was nowhere to be seen, Rare did manage to put the barrels from the original game to good use. Very good use actually…

Not only could Donkey and Diddy fling barrels like in the original game, they could also use them as save points, check points, and in some cases even break them open to discover hidden items. It was also possible to use them as a form of transport, with the barrels propelling you quickly through the air. As the game progressed, the use of barrels became more frequent with later ones moving and rotating, making pinpoint timing essential, especially when a mistimed barrel boost on certain stages saw the simian pair falling to their deaths.

While it's marred by an extremely frustrating, albeit wonderfully exhilarating, mine-cart chase and a very unforgiving industrial stage, the vast majority of *DKC* is like unwrapping a giant present and discovering a honey-coated Sarah Chalke inside. In a single, brave stroke Rare had managed to create one of the finest 16-bit platformers of all time and cemented its reputation as a developer to constantly keep an eye on. Not bad, not bad at all.

ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER, BUT ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS FOR DONKEY KONG COUNTRY'S SUCCESS WAS THAT IT LOOKED LIKE NO OTHER SNES GAME



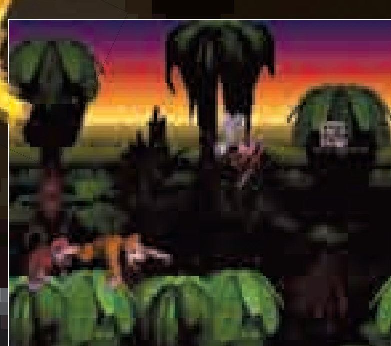
» Winky the Frog was just one of the many animal helpers, and proved adept at mastering dangerous leaps and destroying the otherwise deadly bees.



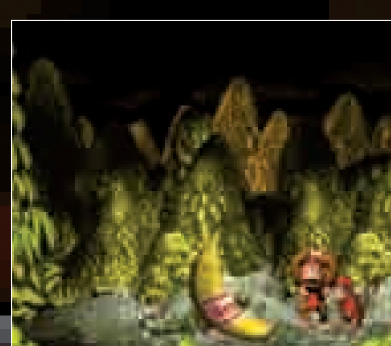
» The Stop & Go Station required nerves of steel, razor sharp reflexes, and a fair degree of luck if you wanted to get through it unscathed.



» Easily one of *Donkey Kong Country*'s most memorable moments. A soft flurry of snow transforms into a raging snowstorm.



» Collect all four letters of the word 'Kong' and you'll be treated to a handy extra life.



» Many of the bosses were simply larger versions of the in-game enemies, but that didn't make them any less satisfying to beat.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SABRE WULF
VARIOUS 8-BITS
1984

SNAKE RATTLE 'N' ROLL
NES, MEGA DRIVE
1990 (NES)

BLAST CORPS
N64
1997



MEET THE FAMILY

When Rare created *Donkey Kong Country*, it decided to greatly expand on the mythology of the original arcade games. The most noticeable difference is that the *Donkey Kong* you now control is not the original primate from the 1981 arcade hit, but his son. To avoid confusion, Rare gave the original *Donkey Kong* a brand new name – Cranky – stuck him in a rocking chair, and turned him into a grumbling old sage who fed his son valuable advice while constantly harping on about 'the good old days.' Cranky wasn't to be the only Kong to help Donkey and Diddy on their quest though. Funky Kong had an airline franchise that made it far easier to traverse *DKC*'s huge map, while Donkey's girlfriend, Candy enabled the two friends to save their progress at various points in the game.



BOSS/RUSH

WHEN WE SQUARE UP TO THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

EVERYTHING IN PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930

GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PUBLISHER:** SNK
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



» Since when did herbivore mean 'to eat planes'?



» The allosaurus has quite a jump on him so stay as high as you possibly can.



» Ignore the beautifully scrolling parallax clouds and just try to stay alive.

Back in 1989 SNK came up with the idea to take its latest shoot-'em-up and replace all the enemies that would usually appear with a dazzling variety of dinosaurs - including some great reptilian bosses. Genius.

Take the first mid-level mayor you face off against, for example. It's a brachiosaurus that uses its long neck to lash out at your bi-plane and catch it within its huge jaws. Alright, so SNK obviously didn't study natural history too thoroughly (we can't imagine any herbivorous dinosaur wanting to chow down on a hunk of metal), but you can't deny how effective the threatening sauropod looked.

Still, there was worse to come. Clocking in at five tons and 93 feet, the allosaurus was your first real challenge – a challenge that was further exacerbated when he ran straight towards you at a terrifying pace, leaving you with next to no room to escape.

After taking to the skies and shooting down enough pterodactyls to make the species extinct, it was time to deal with their bigger cousin – a rhamphorhynchus that used a whirlwind attack to draw your ship towards it.

This was nothing compared to the creation that appeared at the halfway point of level three. Consisting of a huge head attached to a tiny snake-like body, the reptile defied the laws of physics by floating in the air and belching out streams of fire. The weirdness continued upon reaching the bone-filled lair of coleoptera, a giant, heavily armoured insect that split into smaller beasties the more you damaged it.

With two more aberrations of nature defeated, *Prehistoric Isle* took on a nautical theme as your bi-plane transformed into a nifty little sub and continued the fight under the seas and your first denizen of the deep – a gigantic sea turtle. Extremely tough, thanks to its huge shell, the archelon made your task all the more difficult by flinging scores of baby turtles at you. A quick breather and your little sub came face to face with an ammonite. Like the brachiosaurus, reach was on the shelled creature's side and it could catch you in its extendable claws and pull you towards its beak.

The final stage saw the text books, again, thrown out the window when you met the mid-point boss, an angry-looking stegosaur. Fortunately, his bark was far worse than his bite and he proved to be one of *Prehistoric Isle*'s weaker adversaries.

The T-Rex, however, was definitely the yang to the stegosaur's yin, and proved to be a horrifying foe. Several screens high and with a devastating fireball attack it had more lives than the average housecat, and required an insane amount of ten pence pieces to beat. In fact, he's so tough, we've been far too scared to play the sequel.

WE CAN'T IMAGINE ANY HERBIVOROUS DINOSAUR WANTING TO CHOW DOWN ON A HUNK OF METAL



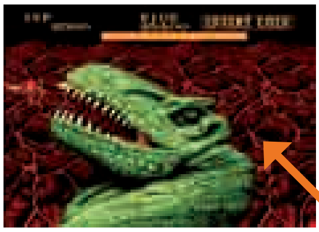
» Oh come on, SNK, you're not even trying now. What the hell is this supposed to be?



» That's one big cockroach… Sadly, giant cans of bug spray haven't been invented yet.



» "If I don't save the wee turtles who will? Aghh! Save me from the wee turtles.



» If you claim to be able to kill this T-Rex with one credit you're obviously a big fat dirty liar.



» SNK once again ignores the history books. The number of meat eating herbivores is truly shocking.



» It's not much to look at but this ammonite has a huge reach..

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learned about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you really want it to. Granted a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver. *Metal Slug 1st Mission* costs a lot less than the original AES cartridge, but it's just as much fun.

METAL SLUG 1ST MISSION

- **SYSTEM:** NEO-GEO POCKET
- **RELEASED:** 1999
- **PUBLISHER:** SNK
- **DEVELOPER:** UKIYOTEI COMPANY



With the release of *Metal Slug Anthology* on PSP and Wii, coupled with the fact that SNK confirmed it is devoid of the Neo-Geo Pocket *Slug* titles, there has never been a better time to purchase the original *Metal Slug 1st Mission*. Along with a few other titles – like *Cardfighters Clash* – it makes buying a Neo-Geo Pocket worthwhile.

One of the highlights for the arcade *Metal Slug* series has always been painstakingly detailed 2D animation coupled with intense gunplay. So, putting it on a handheld like the Neo-Geo Pocket, which wasn't exactly a powerhouse, would seem like a really bad idea. And yet, we have to admit *1st Mission* is one of our all-time favourite *Slug* games – it seems almost wrong to be able to buy it for so little.

Despite lacking the power of SNK's bigger consoles, there's plenty of charm in those small, low-coloured sprites – although not discernible from these screens, you're likely to giggle with glee the first time you see a binocular-wearing guard suddenly spot you, gesticulate wildly, and then promptly pull out a rifle to fire, all with the energy of a Chaplin movie. Audio is also obviously cut down, but the origins of the electronic tunes being beeped out are unmistakable and, again, will raise a smile among *Slug* veterans.

But the real reason *1st Mission* is so enjoyable is because the gameplay is incredibly diverse, and a vast improvement on the traditional *Metal Slug* formula, yet it still retains the series' original ethos and atmosphere. It's a rare thing for games to deviate from tradition and yet remain recognisable. It's a wonder SNK/Playmore never considered making a full-blown console version using the NGP title's mechanics; *1st Mission* to the rest of the *Metal Slug* series is almost what *Symphony Of The Night* is to the other *Castlevania* games.

The semi-non-linear missions which can end up being completed in different orders, vary from destroying key targets to rescuing all the prisoners in a given area. This, in turn, leads to freely scrolling and fully explorable levels, as well as a greater emphasis on platforming. There is great fun to be had making a running jump, firing in a downwards arch, and taking out a whole row of enemy soldiers. Objectives change all the time, which gives the impression of greater momentum as you hurtle along dealing with different tasks.

An ingenious move that should have been copied by others is that even when failing some missions, you're given a second chance which leads to an entirely new level. Get shot down while piloting the Slug Flyer, and suddenly you're placed in a skydiving and parachuting mini-game – success leads to another mission, failure results in death. Alternatively, in other levels you can be captured by the enemy and then have to escape from a prison cell, making your way through a dark forest, using only the knife. This amazing level of diversity, with the exciting set pieces, keeps the gameplay fresh, and encourages replaying it over and over. There are other neat touches too, like being able to enter and exit buildings, lights can be shot out (darkening a level), collecting coins for continues, and also improving your military rank with each successfully completed mission.

Because of so many additions, there's an immense amount of depth to *1st Mission* not present in *Metal Slugs 1-6* – perhaps due to the fact that its development had the involvement of outsiders Ukiyotei Company. This makes it perfect for anyone who owns the *Anthology* but is hungry for more. Now, if only SNK would enhance the formula further and make a console-based Metal Slug 3rd Mission.



» If captured, you're placed in this prison cell with only a knife, and then need to escape via a small tunnel, before heading through a forest.



» Shoot out lights such as those on the far right and suddenly the screen darkens considerably until you encounter more.



» Look at that cheeky chappy standing by the top left – he's spotted you now.

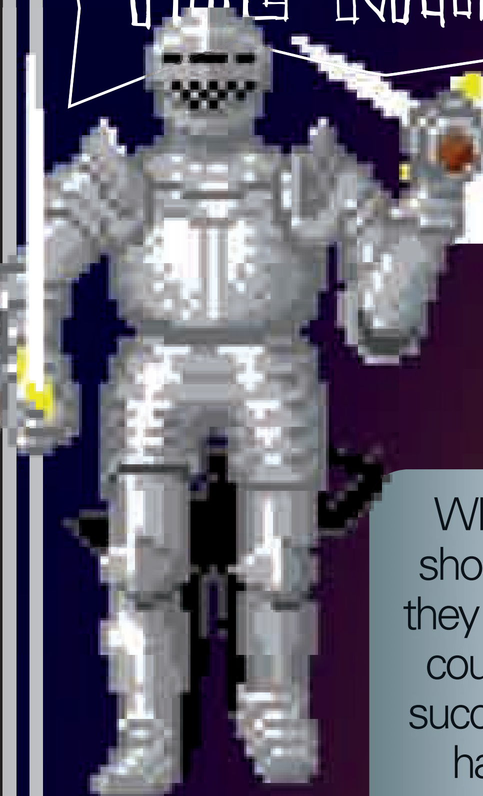


» This map screen showing different levels not always played in a linear order is quite a departure for the series.



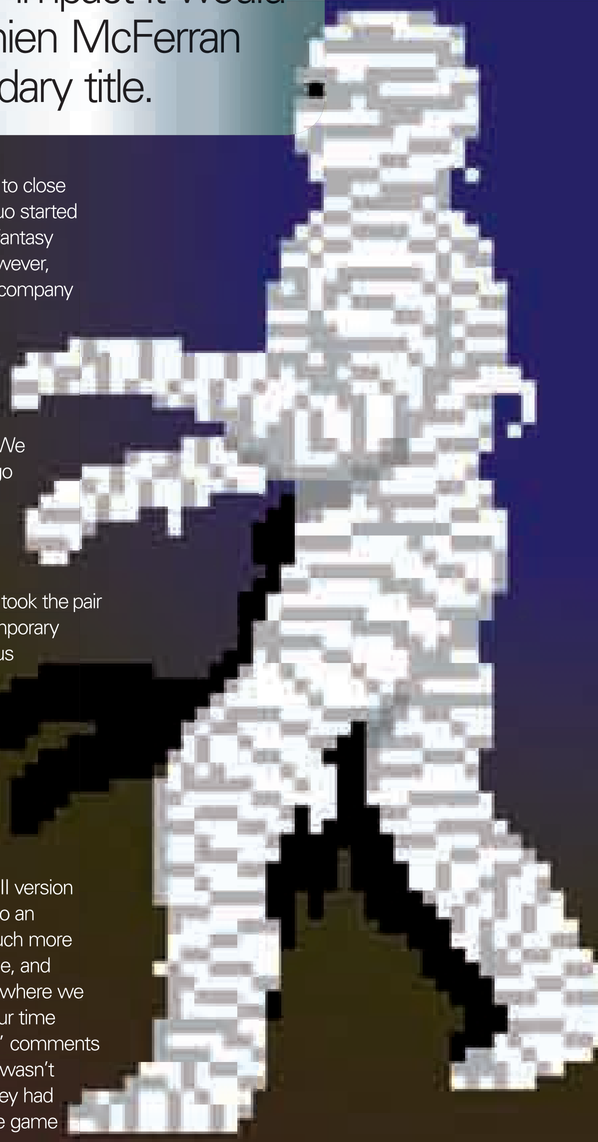
» It's everyone's favourite chubby tank, the Metal Slug. Don't fall down any holes in this level, or the enemy will capture you.

THE MAKING OF...



DUNGEON MASTER

When tiny San Diego studio Faster Than Light (FTL for short) released Dungeon Master on the Atari ST in 1987, they knew they had created something special. What they couldn't have predicted was the tremendous worldwide success the game would achieve and the impact it would have on future videogame design. Damien McFerran speaks to the creator of this legendary title.



IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** FTL
» **DEVELOPED BY:** FTL
» **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987 (ATARI ST)
» **GENRE:** ROLE-PLAYING ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+ (PLATFORM PRICES VARY)

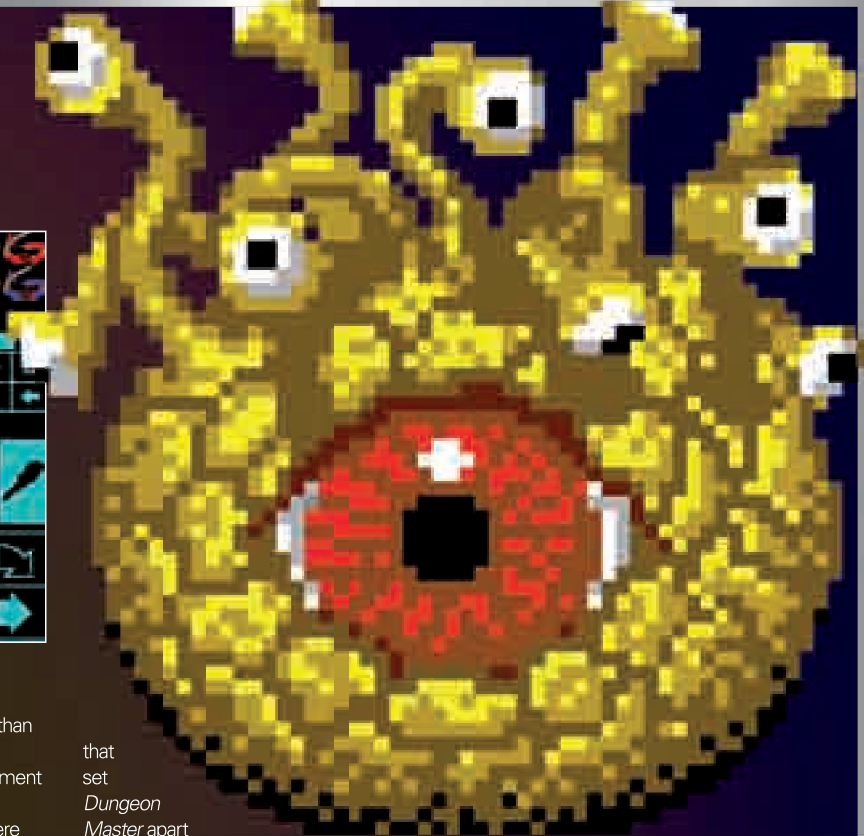


Like so many partnerships forged in the early days of the videogame industry, the team responsible for *Dungeon Master* came together at school. "Andy Jaros and I met during college, attending the University of California," recalls Doug Bell, who worked as director, lead designer and developer on *Dungeon Master.* "Andy had received an Apple II from his parents and we played *Ultima* on it and later *Wizardry*".

It was during these mammoth gaming sessions that Bell realized his true calling: "I thought I could write a better game than *Ultima,*" he modestly comments. With this goal in mind the two friends founded their own development studio called 'PVC Dragon' (PVC as in the material used to create floppy disc storage wallets).

Raising capital by selling shares in the fledgling company to close friends and family the intrepid duo started working on their all-conquering fantasy title, named *Crystal Dragon.* However, after two years of hard slog the company coffers were running dry and a difficult decision had to be made. "We decided to see if another game company was interested in picking up our game," continues Bell. "We had recently moved to San Diego and contacted the local game companies, one of which was FTL, owned by Wayne Holder." FTL, responsible for Apple II classic *SunDog: Frozen Legacy,* took the pair on board in 1983, albeit on a temporary basis. "Wayne decided to take us on for a few months to get the game to a working state," Bell remembers.

A couple of months after joining FTL, Atari sent shock waves around the globe with the announcement of the ST home computer, and at FTL development on the Apple II version of *Crystal Dragon* was brought to an abrupt halt. "The Atari was a much more capable computer than the Apple, and better suited to *Crystal Dragon,* where we were spending a great deal of our time trying to fit it in the Apple's 64K" comments Bell. Unfortunately there simply wasn't enough time to port the work they had already done and complete the game





» Drinking fountains become more rare the further you progress.

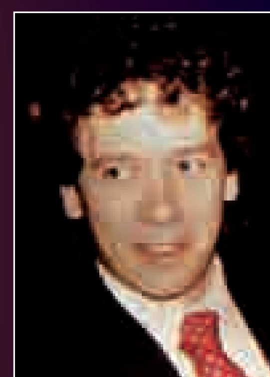
in time for the debut of the new 16-bit machine. "We decided it was important to have a game at the launch of the ST, which was scheduled for late 1984" says Bell. "Wayne, Andy and I decided that porting *SunDog* was a better project than trying to develop a new game for the new platform". The team swiftly updated the sci-fi adventure for the 16-bit generation and the Atari ST version was released on Christmas Eve, 1984. A stunning game on the Apple II, it unsurprisingly replicated the tremendous success on Atari's shiny new home computer.

With one triumph and valuable experience of coding on the cutting edge ST under their collective belts, Bell and Jaros became full time members of the FTL team and turned their attention back to *Crystal Dragon* – which had now been re-named *Dungeon Master.* The creative process called upon additional commitment in terms of programming – and the results were encouraging. "We started with a proof of concept to use a painter's algorithm (drawing from back to front) to create the dungeon," says Bell. "We wanted to see what the performance was, and it was okay, but we realized that we needed to switch from Pascal to C. I spend three weeks learning C and rewriting the dungeon crawl in C, and the performance was better than we expected".

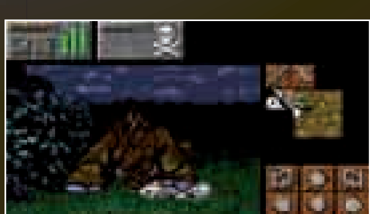
Compared to the sprawling development studios of today, the core team behind *Dungeon Master* was minuscule. "There were basically only five of us," recalls Bell. "Wayne did only a little of the programming – his biggest contribution was to figure out how to do digitized sound on the Atari's sound chip. Andy Jaros did all of the artwork. Mike Newton created the tools, including the DCS (Dungeon Construction Set). Dennis Walker and I did 90 per cent of the game programming." Each team member had their own responsibilities, but additional brainstorming was welcome, as Bell confirms: "We all contributed the ideas that set *Dungeon Master* apart from other games. I think some of the biggest conceptual contributions were probably made by Wayne, particularly with regards to the user interface".

"THERE WERE BASICALLY ONLY FIVE OF US. DENNIS WALKER AND I DID 90 PER CENT OF THE GAME PROGRAMMING" DOUG BELL

The team soon became aware that they could expand the concept beyond the original *Crystal Dragon* brief. "The scope of the game was initially going to be less than what we ended up doing," comments Bell. "We had planned on releasing a game at the end of 1985, and in preparation for that, released a demo in May of 1985. Around September we realized that we had the potential to create a landmark game, so we decided to expand the scope of the game and forgo the 1985 release". The extra time meant Bell and his team could achieve almost everything they had set out to do – a fairly unique event in videogame production: "There were some ideas we



» Doug Bell.



» *Dungeon Master 2* featured improved visuals and sound.



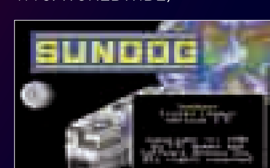
» *Dungeon Master Nexus* took the series into true 3D.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUNDOG
SYSTEMS: APPLE II, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1984

OIDS
SYSTEMS: ATARI ST, APPLE MAC
YEAR: 1987

DUNGEON MASTER II
SYSTEMS: PC, AMIGA, PC-9821, PC-9081, APPLE MAC, MEGA CD, FM TOWNS
YEAR: (1993: JAPAN, 1995: WORLDWIDE)



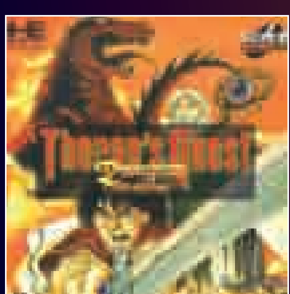
THE MAKING OF... DUNGEON MASTER

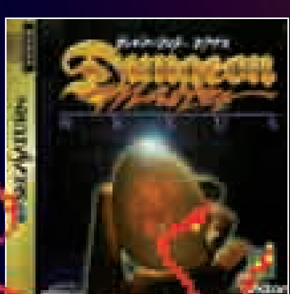


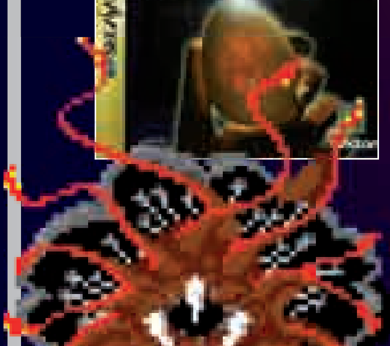
OTHER VERSIONS

Theron's Quest
This PC Engine conversion is probably the most notable port as it deviated from the original title in a number of ways. Subtitled *Theron's Quest,* it is split into seven small dungeons, each of which contained puzzles and maps from the original home computer versions of *Dungeon Master* and *Chaos Strikes Back*. The most sweeping change is the introduction of an anime intro and storyline – the player assumes the character of a teenage boy proving his worth by defeating an evil force (a plot that should come as no surprise to any hardened JRPG fan). The final product is a very toned-down version of FTL's classic game, but is still worth seeking out.

Dungeon Master Nexus
Released in 1998 by Victor Interactive, *Dungeon Master Nexus* is a Japanese exclusive for the Sega Saturn. Developed entirely in Japan (where *Dungeon Master* has a massive following), the game is an admirable attempt to update the classic formula in 3D, but is hampered by the primitive graphic engine and slow, unresponsive controls. Most of the in-game text is in English and while it's not an especially expensive game, the limited print run means it is extremely hard to find these days.

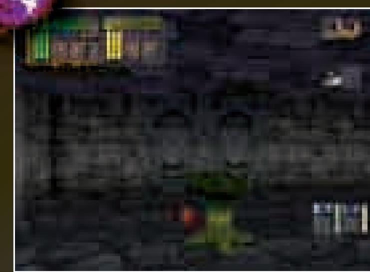








» Mummy! Help!



» A Screamer from *Dungeon Master Nexus.*

had to shelve, but for the most part we took the time to make the game as good as we could without being dictated too much by the schedule".

Dungeon Master would prove to be a tremendously immersive experience and boasted a degree of realism seldom seen in role-playing titles before or since. Characters required food, water and sleep to survive, torches were essential to light the dim passageways (and would burn themselves out after a period of time) and some enemies could be eaten once slain. However, as impressive as these elements seemed at the time, most had been on the drawing board since the early days of *Crystal Dragon*'s development and Bell feels that *Dungeon Master*'s merits actually lie elsewhere: "I think the user interface, graphics, sound and gameplay were what set us apart, and to a much lesser extent, the refinements of what previous dungeon games had done". Indeed, FTL's game was one of the first adventure titles to ditch the keyboard in favour of a fully mouse-driven interface. Another massive breakthrough was the fact that the game took place in 'real time' – role-playing games up to this point were almost always turn-based affairs – just like the tabletop games from which they took their inspiration.

Although the enemies were gifted with only a handful of animation frames, *Dungeon Master* was a masterpiece of spooky set pieces and literally dripped with oppressive atmosphere. "We wanted to create an immersive experience," states Bell. "That was the guiding principle behind having the action take place in the dungeon as much as possible. The scary aspect really just evolved from the fact that up to that point there had not been a real-time 3D dungeon game with the level of graphics and sound in *Dungeon Master.* Once you were sucked into the game it didn't take much to scare you". Anyone who has had the dubious pleasure of playing the game alone in a darkened room will agree.

> "I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT NO GAME EVER GOT AS MUCH ONTO A 360K FLOPPY DISK" DOUG BELL

This level of immersion was so cherished by Bell and his team that they didn't want anything to shatter it. "We were targeting the Atari 520 ST on an SS 360K floppy disk. We didn't want to have to interrupt the gameplay with disk swaps. A lot of the technology in *Dungeon Master* was spent on compression/decompression algorithms. When fully expanded, the game that fitted onto a single floppy disk was about 1.6M. There was a sophisticated memory manager that kept the graphics compressed in memory so that we could fit more." Bell is justifiably proud of his team's achievement in this regard: "I think it's safe to say that no game ever got as much onto a 360K floppy disk or into the Atari 520ST's memory as *Dungeon Master*".

Released in 1987, *Dungeon Master* won a raft of accolades and topped 'game of the year' charts in practically every videogame magazine of the time. It went on to become one of the bestselling 16-bit home computer games of all time and achieved an incredible 50% market penetration on the Atari ST alone. The success of the game was not lost on rival developers, and companies such as Westwood Studios (*Eye Of The Beholder, Lands of Lore*), Mindscape (*Captive*), Sega (*Shining* and *The Darkness*) and Mirrorsoft (*Bloodwych*) tried to emulate the winning formula of FTL's title, with varying degrees of success. *Dungeon Master* was converted to different formats including the Amiga, Sharp



» Scrolls reveal handy hints and various spells.



» Japanese advert for *Dungeon Master.*

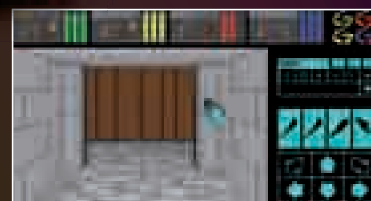




» That pile of bones is one of your fallen champions.

"DUNGEON MASTER WAS DEVELOPED WITH THE IDEA OF CREATING MANY SCENARIOS"

DOUG BELL



» Doors can be opened in a variety of ways.



» The first in a sadly unfulfilled series.

X68000, PC, FM Towns, PC-9801 and Super Nintendo. An enhanced version with additional animation and sound was produced for Commodore's ill-fated CDTV, but development stalled (and was eventually cancelled) due to Commodore's failure to provide FTL with reliable information regarding save-game options on the machine.

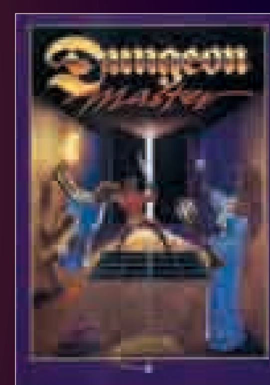
Given the massive success of *Dungeon Master* it was inevitable that FTL would expand on the game in some way. "*Dungeon Master* was developed with the idea of creating many scenarios," continues Bell. The first of these expansion packs was *Chaos Strikes Back* – however, it bucked the trend of the time by being published as a stand-alone game that did not require the original to operate. Although it used the same game engine and many of the same enemy sprites, it proved to be an excellent title and things looked positive for future instalments along the same lines. Sadly, other commitments got in the way, much to Bell's chagrin. "One of my regrets is that we got so busy doing ports of the game that we didn't end up creating enough scenarios," he comments, mournfully.

Chaos Strikes Back was a hit when it was published in 1989 and satisfied the hardcore *Dungeon Master* fans, but what everyone really craved was a full-blown sequel. The wait was to be an excruciatingly protracted one. *Dungeon Master II: The Legend Of Skullkeep* had a lengthy development period and by the time it was eventually released in 1995 the goalposts had not so much been moved, but rather uprooted completely. The game retained the 2D visual style of the original, with the addition of outdoor locations and a more complex game engine. It was an excellent game, but lacked the visual polish to tempt people away from the new breed of 3D first-person adventure titles.

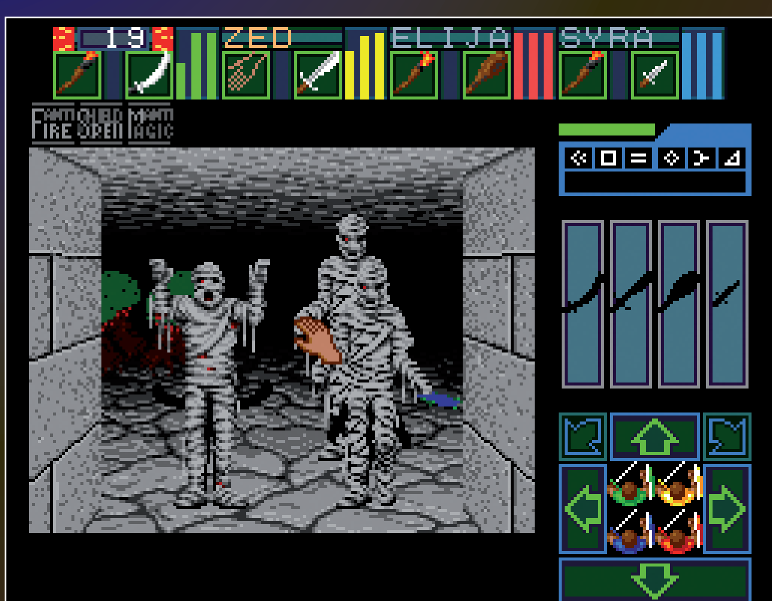
Although the sequel sold well and garnered some positive review scores, it was something of a letdown after the groundbreaking original. It would also prove to be FTL's final roll of the dice and the company ceased operations in 1996. Bell remained with them right up to the bitter end. He has since left the games industry in favour of a career that is more suited to his current lifestyle. "I'm currently a software architect for a company that develops software for the auto insurance claims industry," he explains. "It's quite boring compared to the game industry, but it also consumes far less of my time. I have two sons, nine and 12, and I spend a great deal of time with them… something I'm not sure was possible in the games industry".



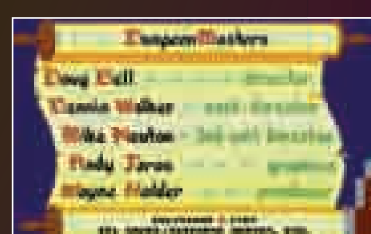
» The entrance to the dungeon – anyone with sense would turn back now…



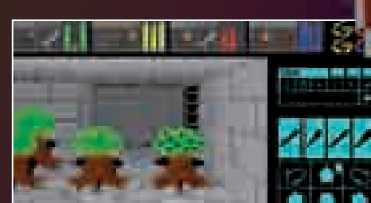
» David R Darrow produced the stunning covers for *Dungeon Master* and *Chaos Strikes Back*.



» The SNES port contained the Super FX chip – although it's hard to tell how it was used.



» The guys who made it happen.



» Tree-like Screamers emit a high-pitched sound to inflict damage on you.



Thanks to Christophe Fontanel of the Dungeon Master Encyclopedia (http://dmweb.free.fr) for allowing the reproduction of several scans and the *Dungeon Master Nexus* screenshots.

RANGER-X

SOUNDS LIKE MAJORETTES



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** GAU ENTERTAINMENT
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** ACTION
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

HISTORY



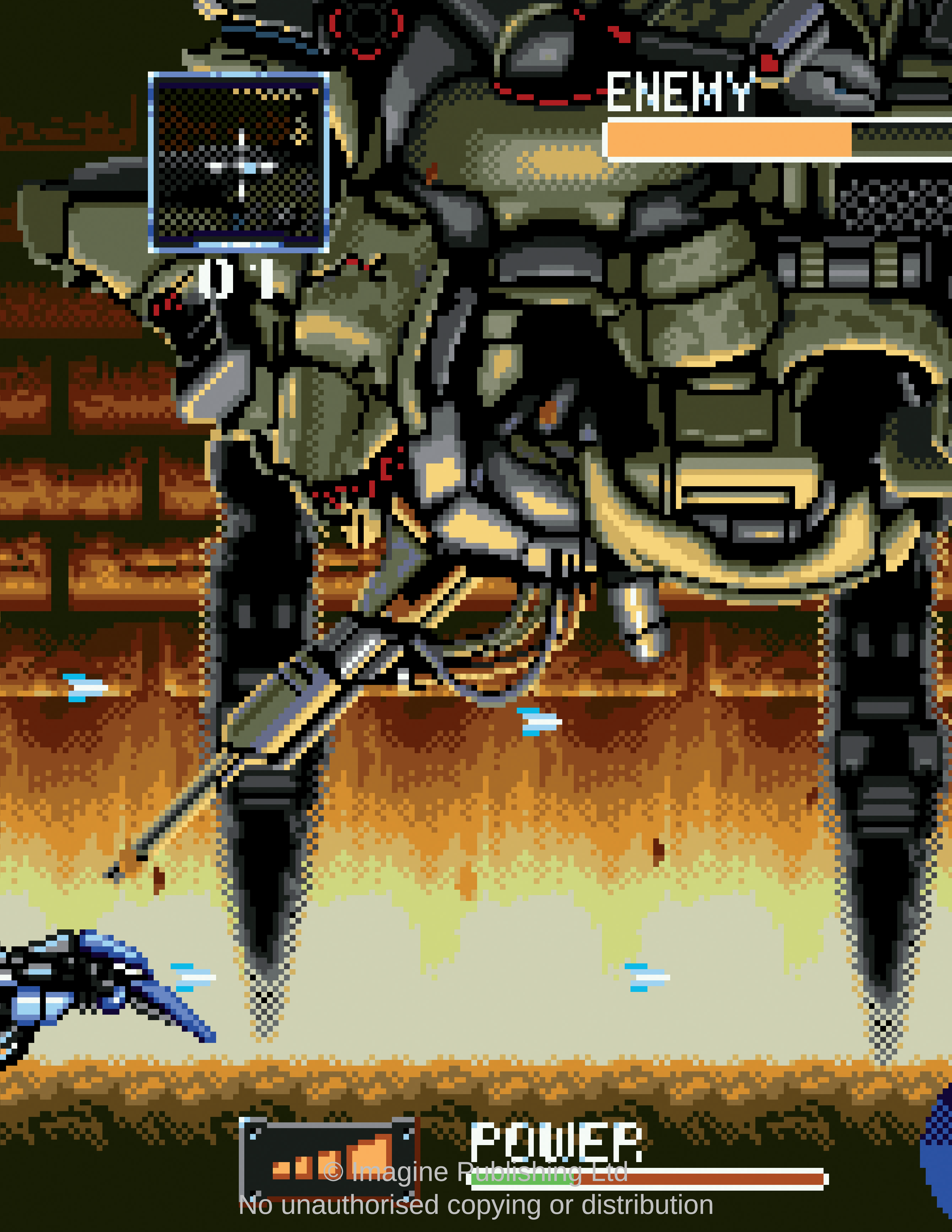
Everyone has their favourite game on a specific system; for me, on the Mega Drive, that favourite game is *Ranger-X*. All those fortunate enough to have played it agree, at the very least, that it's an excellent example of what the MD was capable of technically, while also featuring some damn fine design ideas. What makes it especially noteworthy, is that it was released only in 1993, when the system still had a few years left in it.

In many ways *Ranger-X* symbolises what has been lost in modern games, specifically modern 2D games. When a modern title with a classical flavour is released, be it shmup or retro update, it always tends to lack the super-shiny polish that such titles back in the day had. Everything present here contains an exquisite level of detail and thought. There's an extraordinary amount of parallax scrolling for a start, something which has almost been forgotten in this modern age, and the number of moving layers is so great that the game in several instances develops a pseudo-3D effect.

There's all manner of other graphical trickery going on too. Heat wave effects, transparencies, disjointed sprites connected to form giant creations, damagable environments (the level involving climbing up the side of a building at night, with reflections in each of the windows, which can all be shot up, is truly awe inducing, such is its beauty), and so many others. Then there's the lighting effects, like shooting holes in the roof of a cavern, or descending into a forest and seeing how the screen grows dark, until you've acclimatised to the change of light.

Also, let us not forget the clever usage of the six-button pad, for simultaneously controlling both your mecha and its accompanying motorcycle. This dual dynamic added an entire new level of depth to proceedings, as it was possible to send the invincible vehicle on ahead, firing wildly. As for the other clever gameplay and level designs we mentioned? Well, you'll just have to go out and play the game! We'd wager a week's worth of Navy rum rations that you will utterly love it. We promise.




ENEMY
01
POWER

JOHN SZCZEPANIAK'S

Gaming Illuminati

PART 1 OF 2



FOR OVER A YEAR JOHN SZCZEPANIAK INFILTRATED, GAINED THE TRUST OF AND SPENT TIME AMONGST THE MOST SECRETIVE OF UNDERGROUND VIDEOGAME SOCIETIES, ALL IN ORDER TO WRITE THIS SPECIAL REPORT. THESE PEOPLE AND THEIR WORLD ARE THE GAMING EQUIVALENT OF THE ILLUMINATI – AN ENLIGHTENED GROUP WHO EXIST IN THE BINARY SHADOWS, SEEING, KNOWING, AND OWNING ALL. THE TRUTH OUR REPORTER FOUND WAS MORE TWISTED THAN ANYONE COULD EVER IMAGINE. SOME OF WHAT HE WAS ALLOWED TO TALK ABOUT AFTERWARDS, IS PRINTED HERE.



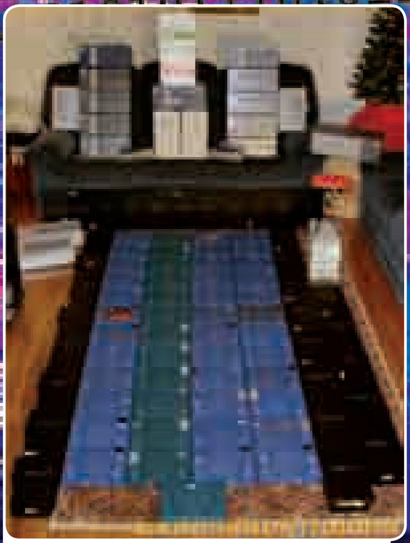
» Excuse the grainy mobile-phone picture, but unfortunately the only known working prototype of Sega's Master System Disk add-on is kept under strict lock-and-key. (anonymous)



» Multiple icon-filled computer monitors engaged in file transfer, one badly burned keyboard, and three N64 beta proto cartridges. Surely the perfect sign of an underworld dealer? (Nicola)



» No, this isn't an unreleased prototype of a Konami console. It's actually a Famicom clone, where for some reason the manufacturer put the Konami branding on it.



» ASSEMbler's collection is very impressive, taking up several dockside warehouses. What's shown is only a tiny fraction, and only what he's allowed to divulge. (ASSEMbler)

I want to tell you something about gaming below the radar. I want to speak about an entire subculture that is so awe-inducing it causes you to re-evaluate the concept of gaming. Forever.

Normal retail methods can make you feel limited by the videogame items displayed. Anyone can buy a copy of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, *Metal Slug AES*, *Ginga Fukei Densetsu* or even the entire Fujitsu Marty collection. Throw enough money at eBay and an array of apparently rare gaming items are yours. But these things are not unusual. It takes intense passion and hard work to get hold of truly obscure goods. There is a secret underground community of high-profile collectors who deal strictly in these most limited of oddities. I actually spoke on this subject before, and the online article was featured on Slashdot.org, reprinted, and then covered by Shane Monroe on Retro Radio, where he described the people as the equivalent of the "retro mafia". But a lot of notes went to waste or were not used, likewise none of the provided images were included. This therefore is the definitive version, detailing this modern technological subculture.

Such groups run the risk of the law plus retribution from demented and utterly psychotic fans, yet still dedicate their lives to the acquisition of restricted items and recording of events. In trying to uncover this secret realm, I was graciously granted access to some of the more high profile members, including the head of one of many such communities. A renowned American gentleman who wishes to be known only as ASSEMbler, he tells us a little of himself and also the nature of such undocumented people, "Truth be told, I own large amounts of items, code, and tools that have never been released, are sometimes of legendary status, or are of singular extant. I also own the names and intellectual assets of several defunct studios. I own the masters and even the rights to some unreleased games. However they were not free, they were not easy goals to attain or items to acquire. It's not easy to track people down and coax them to sell items, to create a company to buy things, to take out loans and risk your financial future to acquire things. I've been sued, threatened and watched for what I do. Why do you think no one has ever seen a picture of me? And now, being part of the industry, working for a games company, it makes it even more complex. I judge a collector's status by the amount of non-retail items owned: if you have dev units, prototypes of consoles and games, or unreleased items. Those take effort to get, everything else is just throwing money at eBay." I ended up speaking with ASSEMbler in America, via phone, many times, and he proved extremely helpful, describing what is, to the gaming community, an exercise in philanthropy. He provided information, contacts, imagery, and above all, a degree of respect and trust within a community sometimes plagued by a hostile outside world which didn't understand them.

Unsurprisingly, several of those I spoke to requested to retain their anonymity throughout this article.

Why go to such great lengths; what is the motivation for risking such danger? Because it's forbidden fruit. Items that gamers shouldn't have, they inevitably want. It's cloak and dagger, certainly far more exciting than stepping into Tesco, and in a way, replicating the role of Indiana Jones discovering that Holy Grail. But ASSEMbler warned of the problems involved. "I'd advise people who collect anything on this level to set up multiple layers of privacy. I wound up having to move, I've changed my phone, and I basically operate covert ops style. My mail gets processed for me by a service, and redirected now."

The entire videogame community is like a microcosm of society, with those at the top and the bottom, and also those hidden from view who control events. Let's take a look at the big game these prestigious hunters track.

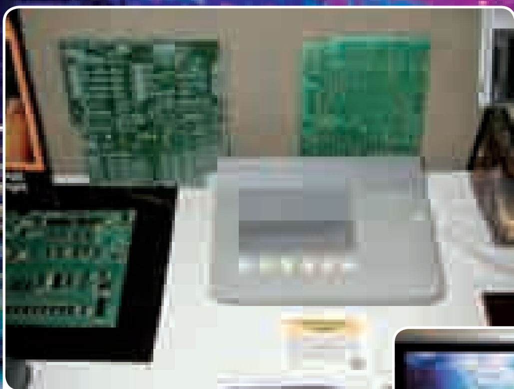
Hardline Hardware

Desired hardware takes many guises, with unreleased prototypes, development and debug equipment, weird hack-jobs, and even commercially-released-but-poorly-marketed-failures all being focused on.

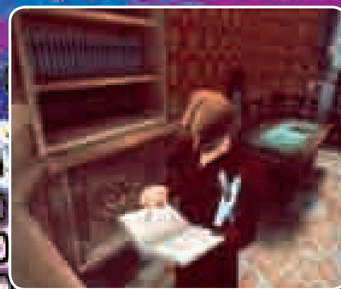
At the lowest end of the commercial spectrum, console bootlegs from places as far flung as central China and Brazil will pique people's interest. Many are Famicom clones, but go further afield

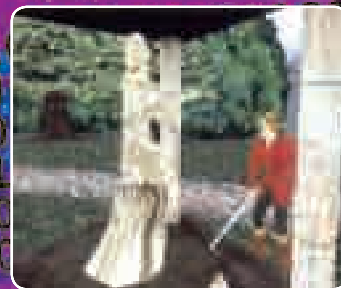
Such groups run the risk of the law plus retribution from demented and utterly psychotic fans, yet still dedicate their lives to the acquisition and recording of things

Gaming Illuminati

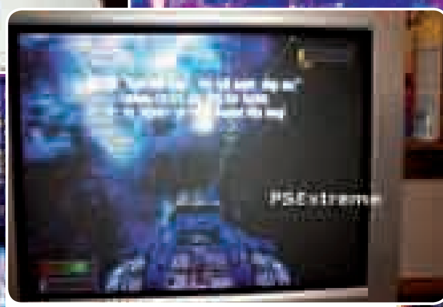


» Was the unreleased Mirai system a joint venture between SNK and Atari? There are several protos floating around – this one is a public display model. (unknown)





» Speaking with a collector who claimed to know Kenji Eno personally, we were informed that WARP had scrapped its development PCs which contained the D2 data for the unreleased M2 system.



» A playable E3 version of *StarCon*, stuck inside a bolted system, is in the possession of a collector who is determined to own all unreleased PSone games. (PSExtreme)



» A beta of *Sonic 2* was found and dumped. Fascinatingly it contained a gameplay element entirely missing from the retail version: Sonic would rebound and go flying when he ran into a wall. A truly great find.

and you'll find all manner of obscurities. How many varieties are there? As many as there are industrialized towns north of the Baltic. Yet people are determined to collect and document them all. For the cream of the commercial crop, your everyday 64DD, Bandai Pippin, and Marty systems will be vying for collectors' money. Released mainly in Japan with a limited audience and small selection of games, these are prized products for displaying.

For something with a little more flavour, check out Nintendo's top secret line of development equipment. Ever heard about the dark pink cartridge-based GameCubes that exist, the fabled NPDP systems? The chunky white cartridges contain hard drives, for speedy and easy changing of data during testing. Some even come emblazoned with Nintendo Dolphin logos. For tastes a little more vanilla, seek the green-boxed NR Reader machines. Great for playing prototype games six months before they hit the streets. You can be sure Nintendo doesn't want you knowing this – its court actions prove the point. But like moths to the flame, people can't help but be fascinated by what they're not supposed to see, especially when knowing the four-figure prices. But not all development equipment is valuable. Dev Jaguars can be bought for little more than retail models; it's the 4Mb Alpine II programming cards that push the value over $1,000 a piece. A little documented fact is that games journalists are actually a reliable source of underground goods. How do you think we manage to play gold copies of burned proprietary discs? Because the games companies supply us with specialist modified hardware.

The real action, though, is unreleased prototypes. We all know about 3DO, but what about its cancelled M2 successor? Never made it public, though the technology was used in Japanese drink machines and Russian ATMs. So enamoured is the underground hardcore collective, there's jovial banter of trying to smuggle said ATMs across the border, just for the hardware. Then there are the undisclosed projects Atari and Shin Nihon Kiaku Corporation (famous for their NeoGeo hardware) were working on together during the early 1990s – since the two were across the street from each other in Sunnyvale, California. The mysterious unreleased Atari MIRAI system is alleged to have been the ultimate result of the collaborations, touted by some as a "NeoGeo for the masses". The MIRAI resembled Atari's 1987 XE Game System with a massive cartridge port, possibly for larger style cartridges. There also exists design shells of Sega's Neptune system (combined MD and 32X) and working prototypes of its AI 8300 – a computer decades ahead of its time, featuring voice, animation, laser disc, touch-screen and Artifical Intelligence technology – a sample unit was sent to the States in the hope of finding investors, but instead it languished in an attic until ASSEMbler picked it up. Sega's disk-unit for the Master System also reached functionality, but is kept strictly under lock and key somewhere.

Sony's SNES-CD add-on reached working proto stage, with development-kits sent out to trusted developers. As such some people now have bulky working units, and even early models of the proposed controller. Meanwhile representing the UK side is Konix's Multi-System, previously covered in Retro Gamer; one collector hinted at having a working unit with playable code, but refused to say any more for fear that this article would prevent him from capitalizing on his information. Finally one of the most obscure, and not in the hands of the underground collective, is the CD-based satellite system WOWOW: a joint venture by Taito (intending to provide perfect arcade ports), JSB (satellite company) and ASCII corporation. It was presented at the 1992 Tokyo Game Show, and the intention was to make games downloadable via satellite. The system was never released, but the downloadable idea was later used by Nintendo for its BS-X Satellaview add-on – and of course now it's de-rigueur among

I've been sued, threatened and watched for what I do. Why do you think no one has ever seen a picture of me?



» A picture of a white development M2, and a black proto of the proposed commercial version. Both owned by Thomas Riemer, one of the biggest M2 collectors in the world.



» The PAL version of *Kizuna Encounter,* where the only difference is the packaging as opposed to actual game code, sells for a small fortune when up for auction.





» A solid-gold diamond-encrusted monochrome Game Boy for $25000 is not obscure. Very expensive, yes, but certainly not of the same calibre as other pieces of hardware.



» *Thrill Kill* was banned due to extreme content, though several different versions were leaked onto the world's online data-web. The most desirable is the complete and uncensored version.



» The unreleased *Robotech* game on the N64 is surprisingly quite playable via emulator, and easily found through Google. Just search for "opus" and "Robotech" to yield results.

companies. If this ever comes up for sale it will be a private, invitation-only auction under a veil of secrecy and via an encoded communications hub, so as to not incite online rioting. Despite enquiries, none of the underground were eager to invite members of the press to such events – I would have to watch the public trades, like the rest of the masses.

As for modern dev kits and prototypes, ASSEMbler tells me "Usually a developer does not own the console, and has to return all proprietary equipment when the lifespan is over. They're usually asked to be destroyed in the field. Unless more companies go bankrupt, you will see them either return the hardware or archive it for spares. You might see some on sale due to employee theft, but considering it took ten years for Saturn items to surface… They technically don't own it in some cases, just the right to make games on it."

He then provided contact details for another collector, who showed images of the only known monochrome Virtual Boy prototype in existence (there is a colour-display prototype, but it's in the hands of a reclusive figure who issued threats if anyone revealed further information). This new contact was acting as proxy, helping a pal of his, in order to shift the hot merchandise. Since there is only one known prototype, and since it was known by everyone to have been stolen by an internal employee, any overt mentioning of it would bring the heat down on the deal. As terrifying as it is for these people to imagine, there are corporate moles who go undercover to infiltrate and break their ranks. The deal was finished in secret, with the final price topping $3000 dollars – it's currently being held in a private vault.

I asked what the greatest personal acquisition for ASSEMbler was. "I suppose my highpoint was the buyout of legacy hardware from Acclaim. I obtained several priceless one-of-a-kind items, from a NES development environment to the only SNES FX chip development setup known to still exist. I walked away with several truckloads of hardware and original art that is really irreplaceable. I also recently acquired most of the early Turbografx-16 development hardware as well as some unfinished games. That was like finding Bigfoot. I doubt I can ever top that one." He elaborated on the final days of Acclaim, describing the speedy liquidation where almost everything was up for grabs. It was a wild time for anyone wanting to acquire rare oddities.

Scintillating Software

If such underground groups are like virtual societies, then unreleased software and rare data is their specialized currency. Games are often traded like-for-like. I spoke to one of the scene's most generous dealers, a Mr L from England, who explained why: "Some people will only trade rare items for unreleased games – money you can come by any time and is easily spent on junk, but unreleased games are harder to acquire. You can offer someone a million and they still wouldn't take it, but if you offered them an unreleased game then they're more willing to part with their rare items."

It's this refined attitude which elevates proceedings to levels comparable with wine and antique collectors. Considering games such as the PAL version of *Kizuna Encounter* reach $12,000, the prices are also comparable. Lower down, the *Nintendo World Championship* cartridge still manages to clock over $6,000 on auction – if you can manage to find someone willing to sell, that is. There are alleged to be only 90 grey and 26 gold cartridges in circulation: a total of 116, which ensures high prices. For some, the willingness to sell is due to the fact said items are available digitally; buying them is purely for completeness' sake. Singular items which have not been duplicated digitally command greater reverence, since there is no other way to experience them.

Of note, here, are the unwritten rules traders live by. When unreleased games are used as trading currency, it's accepted no one will leak them, unless everyone agrees. Some things are never allowed to be made public. A collector of unreleased Psone titles, who amassed a staggering amount of games and dreams of collecting all such prototypes, offered to trade duplicates to further his goal. His rules were simple: trades only, strictly no community releases. He proved his ownership by showing watermarked images of his treasures, such as the fourth instalment of *Star Control.* Curiously some games were actually contained within a bolted shut system, and so trading the games necessitated trading an

If such underground groups are like virtual societies, then unreleased software and rare data is their specialized currency

Gaming Illuminati



» A Japanese drinks machine, which houses the M2 hardware. A point of interest, and safer than photographing Russian ATMs. (Yakumo, Segagaga)



» An image of Taito's unreleased Wowow system, scanned from a games magazine circa 1992. There are no known prototypes in the hands of collectors – not yet anyway.

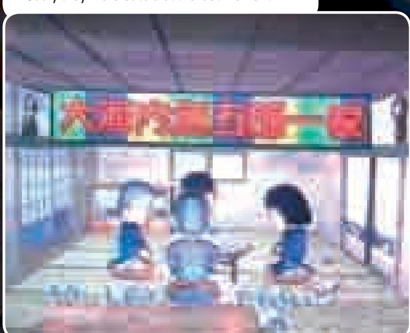


» Okay, so the GameCube isn't strictly retro, but this dolphin-emblazoned HDD-in-a-cartridge based system captivates our interest. How many of you even knew this existed? (ASSEMbler)



» The head of worldofmule.net has one of the only copies of *Son Of M.U.L.E.* for the Mega Drive. Unfortunately due to legal problems he can't release it publicly.

» *Ookouchi Gengorou Ikka* on the N64 was almost bought by Mr L and dumped for the community. Sadly they were outbid at the last moment.



entire machine too. The reason being it was from an E3 show and was sealed for security. You'd need a good network of paid contacts to wrangle this kind of merchandise out of a still breathing company; thank goodness paper trails are easy to fake. All attempts to contact this collector for further info proved futile; contact is limited to fellow aficionados. The lengths gone to acquiring these items is immense. Said individual was later contemplating a trip to India to locate bootleg copies of the rare unreleased *Clayfighter Extreme* on the PSone. American magazine EGM had a tiny column regarding a writer who visited India on Holiday and saw a bootleg copy of *Tekken 5* on the PSone, including a photo of it, but stated that on closer inspection it turned out only to be *Clayfighter*. Most people would ignore this, but wizened collectors saw it as a sign that the game had somehow been leaked and was being duplicated by Indian pirates.

Games journalists can also be a good source of unreleased games. They're sent early review copies and, if a game gets cancelled, it's instant money. Some journalists live by a different code, and once a game is reviewed, code will sometimes go missing. A German I know made obscene amounts of profit selling unreleased review copies of DC games (proprietary DC discs are like pure opium), while another from Belgium is holding onto his English Xbox copy of *Rent-A-Hero*, no matter how much money is waved in front of his face. Accusations were actually raised against one American magazine for leaking a *Biohazard 2* beta, while the only known copies of the unreleased and undumped Lobo beat-'em-up on the Mega Drive come from preview copies later sold by American writers (magazine names omitted at the request of Imagine Publishing's lawyers).

But Japan is still Mecca, with Yahoo! Japan closely monitored by the influential seeking precious goods. But not everything is so easy – one Mr Kyu from Massachusetts reveals, "You think just any Japanese collector knows about this stuff? Rare in Japan means business, there are specific 'people' to go through." This was duly proven to me when investigating the upper echelons of the collector fraternities in Japan, which were virtually impenetrable due to the language barrier and security. You need connections to move in their world, and sometimes it takes upwards of ten years to convince and gain the trust of such recluses. People like ASSEMbler own a home in the US and an apartment in Japan to further such activities.

Luckily a few generous people, such as Mr L, enjoy buying prototypes purely in order to release them to the community. One such (unsuccessful) attempt was *Ookouchi Gengorou Ikka* on the N64, selling online for 57000 Yen. The idea was to fund its release, rather than have it disappear into a collector's hands. He collected donations and a contact in Japan began bidding, but at the last moment was outbid by 2000 Yen. It was so close to success, but after admitting defeat he



» A rare picture of a Saturn development kit, which as you might expect, goes for obscene amounts of money and is highly sought after by underground collectors (anonymous).

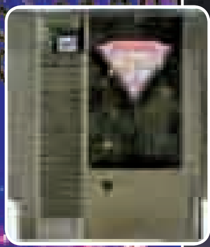
When unreleased games are used as trading currency, it's accepted no one will leak them, unless everyone agrees. Some things are never allowed to be made public



» How many people realise Hudsonsoft developed an N64 version of *Advance Wars* which could link up with the GBC iterations, but was then never released?



» Not quite as rare or sought-after as proto betas of actual games, test cartridges (for maintenance) such as these SNES ones are quite desirable.

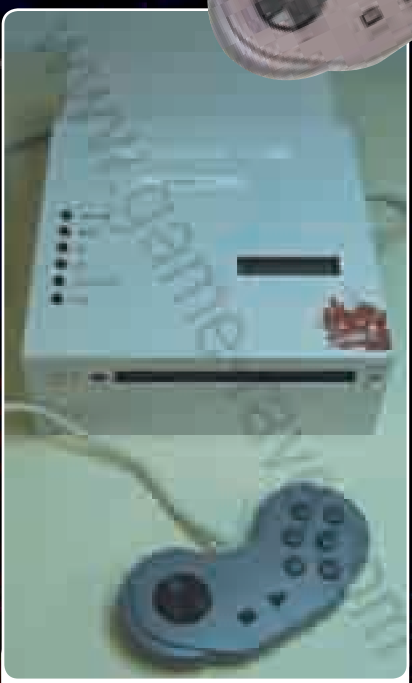






» The Nintendo World Championship cartridge was used as part of a 1990 American NES tournament, and contained special timed versions of *SMB*, *Rad Racer*, and *Tetris*.





» The pictured SNES-CD prototype, with watermarks, was allegedly found in a skip. It has been verified as authentic though, and as can be seen from the inset image, the controller is identical to the prototypes shown by Sony. (Raven-Games)

honourably gave everyone a full refund. Mr L was eager to speak on such matters, "It's a chance to play stuff that most will never see. Smaller items can cost a few hundred, but purchases can often be in the thousands. Usually it takes a lot of time to acquire items – six to 12 months easily; some things take years to surface. Companies should provide more information, instead of leaving it to flimsy press releases, leaked documents and speculation – it would help clear up the facts and paint a better picture of gaming history." So popular is his generosity, that there is constant discussion as to which title should be pursued next. Long may he succeed.

Some people go to insane lengths to make unreleased games freely available for all. Because such tiles are unfinished there will often be missing pieces of code, meaning the game won't function correctly. But there will always be those who toil tirelessly to reprogram unfinished games to a level where they're playable. An E3 preview copy of *Robotech* on the N64 was leaked, but due to being unfinished and horribly buggy, the gentlemen behind the illegal release took the time to recode sections and make it more stable. The praiseworthy coder commented on his website, "For the most part, the ROM image is the same demo we showed at the E3 trade show in May 1998. After Gametek died the following July, I managed to get access to a N64 development system for a couple of weeks, and managed to rebuild the demo version, with a couple of additional but minor improvements."

With some unreleased game data only existing on the development PCs of companies (like WARP's D2 for Matsushita's M2), the code needs to assembled, making sure all files are intact, and then compiled before it can be played. This is another reason why people seek betas of even commercially released titles. When rooting through the early code you can often stumble across partially finished sections which will later be removed – sometimes merely jokes between team members, and other times entire levels. This is why betas can be almost as desirable as actual unreleased games.

But many people abhor public releases and those that perform them, complaining it devalues things, and with CD media, allows people to sell duplications for profit. ASSEMbler is more concerned about the legal implications, "Software allows reverse-engineering and potentially piracy. Everyone remembers the damage done by the code that became Dreamcast boot CDs. It would be foolish to openly distribute software for dev kits. I don't know if you have ever been sued or threatened with legal action, but it's expensive and not fun."

I also spoke to LostLevels.org founder Frank Cifaldi, about the reluctance to release publicly. "A lot of people have this elitist need to be the only person able to play a game, some have this weird belief that holding on to a one-of-a-kind game gives it 'legendary' status and makes it more 'historically valuable' than it would be if publicly available, and still others just mouth off about how much they paid for the damned things. No one but the game's copyright holder is entitled to have a game never sold at retail level. The rest of us either rely on the kindness of strangers, or spend a hell of a lot of money dealing on the black market. To me, once I'm over the excitement of being Indiana Jones and discovering something special and new, I specifically want to see how other people react to it. Seeing people actively playing and discussing the game I found is much more gratifying to me than being able to brag about having something."

So concludes the first part of John Szczepaniak's Gaming Illuminati. Next issue we'll have the final instalment, which promises to cover *Sonic Xtreme*, *Mother 3*, secret digital data vaults, and also the social camaraderie which is prevalent throughout. Many special thanks to the ASSEMbler community for providing assistance and images.

THE CLASSIC GAME

ZILLION

Compared to the big three 8-bit home-micros, and also Nintendo's NES, Sega's Master System, which is from the same era, may seem a little underloved. But we here at Retro Gamer are determined to champion the machine's best games. Zillion was hailed as a classic by all those who played it; if only more people had played on a Master System!

IN THE KNOW



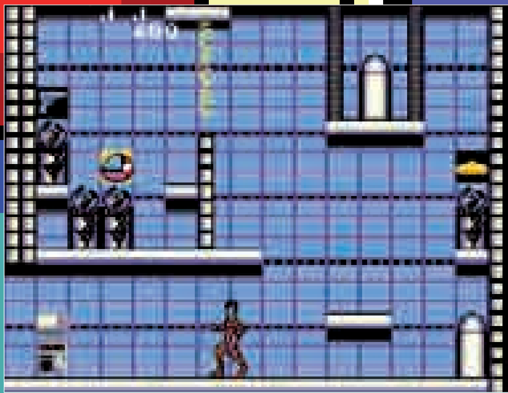
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3

The Master System, much like the Game Boy, is not a machine from which it is easy to choose Classic Game coverage. There are countless titles, of course, but it's always the same few which are mentioned again and again (*Phantasy Star* for example has already been covered as part of the series). Furthermore, considering the dominance of other companies' hardware at the time, even if a third of all SMS owners hailed a single game as the greatest on their machine (a one-to-three attachment ratio being nearly unprecedented), that number of people would still be comparatively far lower than even those praising an average selling NES game, for example. This has resulted in several great SMS games being doomed to anonymity amongst the masses simply because not enough people owned the native hardware originally. Unless you were part of the secret club of Master System owners, and also lucky enough to have *Zillion*, you will not realise that it's a classic game.

Looking at the drab cover art, featuring a computer monitor, you wouldn't think it, but *Zillion* was a revelation compared to the mostly simplistic titles released alongside, and is also the antithesis to the hand-holding of modern titles. It sits in that strange region of gaming we remember fondly, as something which broke new grounds, but due to the current climate will never be made in quite the same way again. When starting you're introduced to ten symbols which need to be inputted at computer terminals throughout the game; typing four of the same symbol results in a specific reaction but costs one ID card (shutting off laser barriers and gun turrets, activating warps, etc), while opening doors requires a combination of four symbols, but doesn't use up cards. These ID cards need to be scavenged from item pods found in each room, and are of a limited supply, while the pass codes for doors are randomly generated – they are only revealed, individually, from certain item pods in the specific rooms.

It's not an easy dynamic to explain, but the result is a game which respects the player and assumes they have intelligence. While a modern action/adventure title will keep lists of learned things, requiring only a menu selection to activate, *Zillion* forces you to write everything down, as you're playing, and thanks to the randomisation of door codes, each and every time you play. It might not sound compelling, but it heightens the atmosphere and also satisfaction of solving things.

Then there's the *Metroid* connection (we mean the first *Metroid*, released in 1986). *Zillion* requires the accumulation of ID cards, levelling and weapon increasing power-ups, items which improve vision, plus two additional characters with their

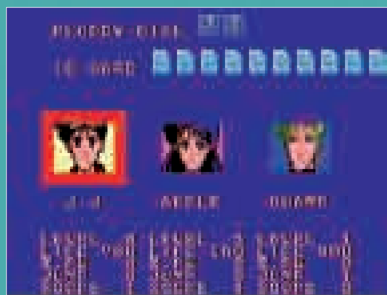


» Opa-opa (from *Fantasy Zone*) makes an appearance as an item which levels you up. Here we also see life-restoring bread, and the gun power-up.

ZILLION SITS IN THAT STRANGE REGION OF SOMETHING WHICH BROKE NEW GROUNDS, BUT DUE TO THE CURRENT CLIMATE WILL NEVER BE MADE IN QUITE THE SAME WAY AGAIN

own particular traits. Gradually these characters increase in power, enabling them to see where traps are, take more damage, and also fire the more powerful blasts. The sense of accomplishment when levelling up energy or your Zillion Blaster weapon, thereby allowing stronger capsules to be broken into and the game to progress further, is exactly as it is in *Metroid*. Every success feels like a triumphant victory over some unseen and antagonistic agent (in this case, the brains of Kotaro Hayashida, the game's main planner). *Zillion* also features a single, massive, retraceable, maze-like map which is slowly explored. Most strikingly, this reveals the same predilection for lengthy vertical passages (including elevators) interspersed with lengthy horizontal tunnels. The *Metroid* similarities are unmistakable, but maybe it's too easy to make comparisons only to *Metroid*, since *Zillion* perhaps also shares an equal amount of binary DNA with *Impossible Mission*. There are the same elevator shafts and tunnels, plus rooms which require the examining of various fixtures (item pods, as opposed to furniture), and also the need to assemble separate pieces of code.

While it is very much like the two aforementioned games, enough to entice fans to check it out, *Zillion* is also entirely unlike them when it comes to styling and atmosphere; it is a rare title which despite clearly borrowing ideas from elsewhere, still manages to make itself unique. The opening is atop a green planet surface besieged by Terminator-esque cyborgs, and there is much excitement had battling past them to reach the one elevator



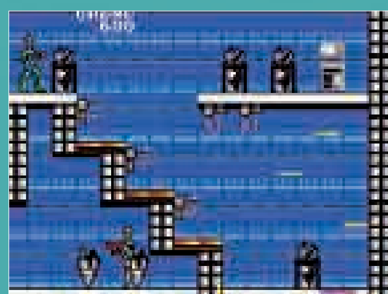
» This is a good screen: both side-characters rescued, a healthy stockpile of ID cards, plus two out of the five floppy disks found.



» This secret room can be found by venturing back inside the opening space craft.

which travels beneath the surface. There's also some expertly placed tension since, for example, disabling a laser forcefield is only temporary; if you don't rush past when it's down, grab what you need and then get out immediately, you will lose much health and perhaps even die. Elevators meanwhile are loose fitting affairs, with no precise placement for stopping – allowing one to be lowered to just below the enemies' line of fire, before shooting back with impunity. While at first enemies can only shoot whilst standing, later foes do so whilst lying down and also upwards (making for some tense encounters). The goal is to eventually find five incredibly well-hidden floppy disks, containing some kind of top secret data, input a detonation code to destroy the alien base, before finally making your escape.

As no doubt shown, it's a difficult game which requires patience, thinking, and also dexterity – but mainly patience. In truth, it's likely that few had the necessary skills back in the day to complete it, especially with no save ability and guides only being available through magazines, but once you've absorbed and fully understood the code system in place, it is a joy to play even if you don't actually reach the end.



» Once you've rescued Champ, the game's difficulty ramps up even further. There are cyborgs and auto-guns everywhere. It's gonna be tough.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FANTASY ZONE
SNES
1986

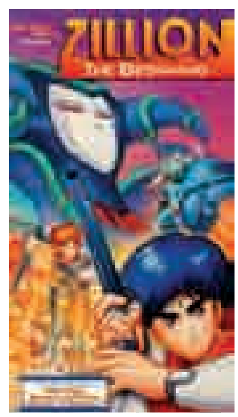
PHANTASY STAR
SEGA MASTER SYSTEM
1987

WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP
SMS
1989



ORIGINS AND FOLLOW-UPS

Contrary to what many incorrect online sources say, the first *Zillion* SMS title was not developed by Tatsunoko Production. Tatsunoko Production in fact created the original anime TV series (31 episodes, running at 30 minutes each), and later an OVA movie. The overall storyline involved the genocide of humanity by aliens and three teenagers wielding the titular Zillion weapons, who all stand against this. The two games (since there was a sequel), were actually developed by Sega. The mistake comes from Tatsunoko Production's name being first on the title screen, but some quick cross-referencing proves that all those who worked on the first *Zillion*, were also employed by Sega on several other in-house titles (including the renowned Tokuhiko Uwabo, who did the music for *Phantasy Star IV*). Another case closed, by Retro Gamer.





SEGA SATURN

SEGA'S 32 BIT MACHINE IS WIDELY VIEWED AS SOMETHING OF A DISASTER, BUT WHILE IT MIGHT NOT HAVE SET THE WORLD ALIGHT IN TERMS OF SALES, THE CONSOLE WAS A VERITABLE TREASURE TROVE OF CLASSIC SEGA GAMING GOODNESS THAT FOR THOSE THAT CHOSE TO EMBRACE IT, WAS A PEERLESS CONSOLE.



It's not often that it can be said of a console that it mimics – for better or worse – the very attributes its parent company displays, but the Saturn is such a machine. On the one hand, the Saturn very much reflects the corporate ineptitude and lack of unity that blighted Sega at the time (and indeed, its relative failure at market certainly was a major contributor in Sega's eventual pull-out from the games market barely more than half a decade after it launched), boasted one of the most complex system architectures around (and whose predominantly 2D orientation was at loggerheads with the three dimensional shift the industry was undergoing at the time) and an array of games that was out of touch with what mainstream consumers wanted; on the other hand, for those who appreciate Sega's unique style of games – especially its arcade wares – along with the efforts of the Saturn's few (yet staunchly loyal) third-party supporters, there will never be another console quite like Sega's 32-bit machine.

TROUBLED BEGINNINGS

In a trend that would set the tone for the console's traumatic life, the Saturn was born into a Sega family beset with problems. Despite the successes of the Mega Drive – predominantly in the West – Sega's management had increasingly fallen out of touch with the demands of both the market and the industry.

The Saturn started out life in the early 1990s deep within Sega of Japan's Research and Development department. Originally going under the working title Gigadrive, the machine was essentially designed to be a 2D powerhouse of a console with secondary 3D capabilities using CD-ROM technology and would have sat, performance wise, somewhere between Sega's System32 and Model 1 arcade boards. While this might have seemed like a suicidal prospect at the time, Sega's thinking did have a certain degree of logic to it. The first consideration was the cost of the machine. Sega's Model 1 board – which by the end of 1993 was wowing gamers with the likes of Yu Suzuki's *Virtua Racing* and *Virtua Fighter* – was very expensive, as were proving the attempts to shoehorn 3D graphics into console gaming, either in the form of chips-in-carts (such as Sega's SVP chip that was used in the Mega Drive port of *Virtua Racing* or Nintendo's Super FX chip) or upgrade modules such as the 32X, while not achieving arcade perfection. The second was the concern that the market might not be ready for 3D yet, with the rapid failure of the 3DO – the first 'next-gen' machine to hit the shelves – appearing to vindicate Sega's management.

With GigaDrive, Sega thought it had found the ideal solution to this: create a machine that could handle Sega's Model 1 games, but focus

Switch or chip?

In terms of modding, the Saturn remains one of the most modification friendly machines out there. In principle, there are two main types of mod; the first is the double switch, the second the mod chip. The former sees two switches getting installed on your machine: the first allows you to select between PAL, American, Japanese and 'Japanese 2' (allowing you to select English language options in certain games), and a second 50/60Hz switch. In the case of mod chips, these will allow you to play pirate games; however, these games will still be region encoded, so a Japanese pirate copy won't boot on a chipped PAL Saturn without a region decoding cart or switch.



IN A TREND THAT WOULD SET THE TONE FOR THE CONSOLE'S TRAUMATIC LIFE, THE SATURN WAS BORN INTO A SEGA FAMILY BESET WITH PROBLEMS

SEGA SATURN



Year released: 1994

Original price: £399.99 (UK), $399.99 (US), Yen 44800 (Japan)

Buy it now for: £10 - £150 (depending on model)

Associated magazines: Sega Saturn Magazine, Mean Machines Sega, Edge, Sega Power, Saturn Power

Why the Saturn was great… Despite the errors that saw Sega build the Saturn as a predominantly 2D machine, for fans of Sega's unique style of game – especially their arcade wares – the Saturn remains the only place to enjoy the works of Sega's internal development teams at a time when they were arguably at their creative peak.

SEGA SATURN







» Games like *Virtual On*, with heavy Japanese styling had limited appeal in the West, but it didn't stop them being amazing.

WITH A PRICE POINT WAY BEYOND MOST GAMERS' MEANS AND LAUNCHING DURING THE GAMES INDUSTRY'S QUIET TIME OF SUMMER, THE MOVE BACKFIRED HORRIBLY

Lobotomy

While the majority of the Saturn's best games came from The Land of the Rising Sun, that's not to say the West was without its star developers, case-in-point, Lobotomy. While it was tough leaving out *Death Tank* and *Exhumed* off our list of top ten games, the impact the developer had on the Saturn shouldn't be underestimated, with its SlaveDriver engine used in *Exhumed* going on to power the Saturn ports of *Quake* and *Duke Nukem 3D*, arguably the best console ports of either game on any of that generation's machines.





» *Virtua Fighter* aside, the Japanese launch line-up was total crap; case in point, the abysmal *Gale Racer* (nee *Rad Mobile* in the West).

predominantly on 2D games ready for a Japanese launch in late 1994. Sadly, Sega's efforts couldn't have been more misplaced. A year before the launch, Sony Computer Entertainment formally announced that it intended to enter the console market with a 3D-capable machine that not only knocked the Saturn into a cocked hat, but blew the Model 1 board that gamers had been swooning over away. Sega was in major trouble.

The result was a complete redesign of the Saturn. Out went the simplistic single processor that had been intended, and in went two SH-2 RISC processors, along with dual VDPs in a bid to create a machine that was capable of 3D performances somewhere between the Model 1 and the all new Model 2 board that was being prepared to launch with *Daytona USA*. Suffice to say, it was a tough haul, and this showed when the console launched on 22 November in Japan, with a launch line-up that included such abysmal efforts as *Gale Racer* (known as *Rad Mobile* over here), it all meant that Sega needed a seriously big game to wow the Japanese punters – and fortunately, it had just that. While Yu Suzuki and his AM2 team had enjoyed fame before with the likes of *Out Run*, AM2 had really shot to fame with the Model 1 arcade board, first with *Virtua Racing*, then *Virtua Fighter*. Using realistic physics to heighten the perception of realism, *Virtua Fighter* in particular had been impressing arcade-goers ever since its 1993 debut. Unsurprisingly, Sega ensured that the Saturn port of the game was ready to go when the console launched in November, with the console selling a quarter-of-a-million consoles in just two days.

While the following months would see the figures tail off, it left Sega free to plan the Western launches, but this presented its own problems. High price points and a general disinterest in next-gen formats had already effectively accounted for the 3DO and Atari Jaguar by 1995 (both were still being supported, but the writing was clearly on the wall) in the West, and Sega of America boss Tom Kalinski felt it wasn't the time to launch a new console while 16-bit sales were still strong (a view that would later be confirmed, as 16-bit sales remained strong for well over another year). However, Kalinski's political stock within the company had taken a major knock with the rapid failing of the 32X (something that would also not be helped by the launch of a new, more capable console), and with SoJ keen to beat the PlayStation to market, the Western launches of the Saturn were pushed through as a matter of urgency.

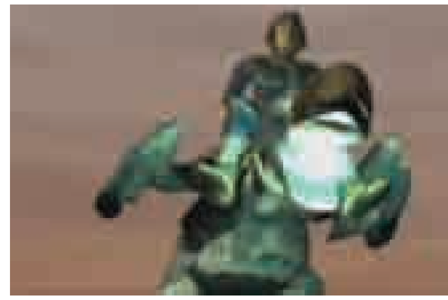
It was a disaster. The Saturn launched on 27 April 1995 in the USA, followed by 8 July in Europe. With a minimal amount of fanfare, games and consoles simply arrived on the shelves and in some countries,







» Team Andromeda's *Panzer Dragoon* franchise wasn't a huge seller on the Saturn, but was an amazing series.



neither the specialist press nor the media at large were sent review material; from one day to the next, the Saturn simply arrived.

The games were a mixed bag as well. Whereas Sony had been hyping up *Ridge Racer*, *Toh Shi Den* and other texture-mapped 3D games ahead of the PlayStation's launch, the highlights of the Saturn's launch were the 'raw' polygonal *Virtua Fighter* (bundled with machines) and a port of *Daytona USA* that AM2 had hurriedly ported in under six months. With a price point way beyond most gamers' means (£399 in the UK and $499 in the USA) and launching during the games industry's quiet time of summer, the move backfired horribly.

THE 'BIG THREE'

As Christmas drew closer, things were getting perilous for Sega. The PlayStation launch came and went, and – adding further weight to Kalinski's argument that the West wasn't ready to go next-gen – failed to really attract the huge sales Sony had wanted (and spent large amounts of market cash on chasing), Sega needed some big hits, and it looked like they were going to get them.

Thanks to the initial rush to redesign the console, the first generation of games had to be rushed through. However, by September 1995, Sega of Japan's teams had had a year to perfect their techniques and most importantly, had some great games they could try them out on. During this time, Sega's Model 2 board had become the arcade hardware of choice for the arcade department, and its two top studios, AM2 and AM3, had three games ready for porting. The first to make it was AM2's *Virtua Cop*. The light gun game had been struggling since its heyday in the Eighties, and AM2 saw the chance to reinvigorate it with *Virtua Cop*, a game that was as much about precision as raw adrenaline. The second AM2 title was *Virtua Fighter 2*. With the success of the *VF1* undeniable, a sequel was inevitable and Suzuki's team managed to deepen the game and increase its fluidity to the point where it seemed further improvements would be impossible. The third game in the queue was AM3's *Sega Rally*. The brainchild of Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the game was about as far removed from *Daytona USA* as you could get, attempting to create a deep rally game that was realistic enough to the point of being convincing, but without making things overly complex. In short, the ports were a complete success. Technically as well as in gameplay terms, there was nothing on any console to touch them at the time, and while *Sega Rally* and *VF2* would miss Christmas in Europe, it didn't stop *Sega Rally* setting a record for the fastest selling CD game in the UK, and global sales for the Saturn finally started to catch up with those of the PlayStation.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

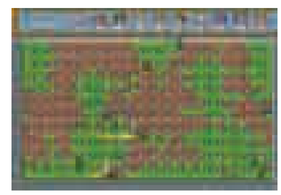
With the Christmas period a comparative success, Sega was upbeat going into 1996. At E3 that year, Kalinski announced that "Sega games would be the success of 1996", and, on paper, he should have been right. The Saturn's line-up for the year would be strong, including a new *Sonic* game, *NiGHTS*, a new *Panzer Dragoon* title, *Virtua Cop 2*, a reworked *Daytona* and *Fighting Vipers*, but it didn't end there. Sega also took the wraps off its new analogue controller (due to be bundled with Yuji Naka's *NiGHTS*) and Sega also used E3 to unveil its NetLink modem and internet service, which was expected to debut in the States that Autumn for $199 and, by offering an affordable internet access machine, would help Sega sell the 1.5 million consoles it was aiming for in 1996, as would aggressive price cuts on the hardware – and with much hype surrounding the Model 3 board, Kalinski also used E3 as a platform to announce Yu Suzuki's third game.

Sadly, things didn't go according to plan. Consumer interest was changing. While arcade ports had been fine before then, gamers were expecting more – and the PlayStation was delivering that in spades. No better is this demonstrated than with *Formula One*. Both Sony and Sega had acquired licences for the 1995 season, but whereas Sega squandered its licence on a rather tame arcade-style racer called *F1 Challenge* (or *Live Information* as it's known in Japan) that only featured a handful of playable cars and tracks (of which only three were real), Sony entrusted Psygnosis with its licence, who in turn enlisted the help of Bizarre Creations to create an in-depth *Formula One* sim that attempted to recreate the whole season. While Sega's game launched first, it barely managed to register on the sales charts, whereas *Formula One* became Europe's bestselling game of 1996 and finished second in the global sales charts to another PlayStation title, *Final Fantasy VII*.

It wasn't only here that Sega squandered chances. *Tomb Raider* had been knocking around on release schedules as far back as the 32X, and given Core's strong relationship with Sega, it came as scant surprise that Lara Croft first debuted on the Saturn. Not only did Sega



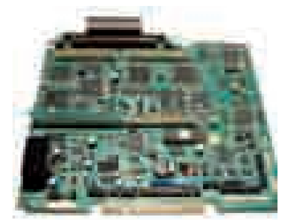
» While best known for its racers, AM3's *Last Bronx* was an interesting alternative to AM2's beat-'em-ups.



» *Saturn Bomberman* featured ten-player support, although you needed a really big screen to enjoy it properly.

ST-V Titan

One aspect of the Saturn that's frequently overlooked is the ST-V Titan arcade board. Essentially a Saturn with a bit more RAM, the ST-V failed to be as successful as its successor, the NAOMI, but did have an impact nevertheless. Sega themselves used it for *Dynamite Deka* (nee *Die Hard Arcade*, AM1), along with *Decathlete* (*Athlete Kings*, AM3) and *Winter Heat* (AM3), while smaller arcade companies such as Treasure (*Radiant Silvergun*) and Raizing (*Soukyugurentai*) were also able to use the board as well – with the fact the board was based on the console allowing for much easier console ports.





» Even though the machine is widely regarded as a 2D powerhouse, the Saturn was capable of great 3D graphics.



» Compared to the game that immediately preceded it, *Virtua Fighter 2* was a technological miracle, and played fantastically.

SEGA SATURN





» In later years, SNK jumped on board the Saturn bandwagon with its 1Mb RAM cart, which allowed for *Metal Slug* to be ported.

WHEN SONIC X-TREME WAS ANNOUNCED AND DEMOED AT E3 '96, SUCH WAS THE BACKLASH THAT SEGA ULTIMATELY QUIETLY DROPPED THE GAME

squander a chance to make a fuss about this (a mistake Sony did not make), the fact the subsequent PlayStation version looked better added fuel to the argument that the PlayStation was the better machine. This was also true of the ports of Psygnosis' two big PlayStation launch games, *WipEout* and *Destruction Derby*. When it was announced that both games would receive Saturn conversions (along with some of Psygnosis' other PlayStation titles), it seemed like Sega had pulled off an elaborate coup, but ultimately, the delays and subsequent poorer port qualities meant neither game aided the Saturn's cause.

However, it wasn't just Sony to blame in this. Sega's reliance on arcade ports at a time when the first dedicated console games were coming through did nothing to endear the console to gamers, especially when its next big round of conversions – *Fighting Vipers*, *Virtua Cop 2* and *Daytona USA CCE* – were arguably weaker games than the 'Big Three' that had preceded them 12 months earlier.

To compound this, Sega's own console-specific stuff failed to register with the punters. While both exquisite titles that still hold up well today, both *NiGHTS* and *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* failed to sell the console. And what of *Sonic*? When *Sonic X-treme* was announced and demoed at E3 '96, such was the backlash that Sega ultimately quietly dropped the game (see Retro Gamer 22) and started work on a high-resolution port of Mega Drive game, *Sonic 3D Blast*.

1997 – THE END IS NIGH

Having been pushing Sony hard 12 months earlier, as 1996 rolled into 1997, it became clear that Sega had virtually conceded the market to Sony, with Nintendo second in line to scoop up whatever remained.

With Sega's proposed merger with Bandai rapidly collapsing and the company busy with the Dreamcast (the hardware was already being demonstrated behind closed doors at E3), 1997 took on the form of one final hurrah for the Saturn. Typically, this took the form of more arcade ports – *Manx TT*, *Last Bronx*, *Marvel Super Heroes* and an assortment of ST-V ports being the most high profile ones – but would also see some interesting new additions. The biggest factor was *Sonic*'s long overdue arrival on the console. The first game – *Sonic 3D Blast* – was a glorified high-res port of the Mega Drive game, who's main highlight was bizarrely enough, the CD soundtrack crafted by Sega of Europe's in-house musician, Richard Jacques, but this was just the start. During the summer, Sega launched, *Sonic Jam*, a retro pack with the four Mega Drive games and a 3D 'Sonic World' where Sonic could run around and perform various tasks as a conceptual demonstrator for what would later become *Sonic Adventure* on the Dreamcast. This was



» In later years, games like *Soukyugurentai* from small developers like Raizing helped keep Saturn fans stocked with games.

followed by *Sonic R*, which was developed by Travellers Tales (who had done *Sonic 3D Blast*) and was a platform-based racing game that while perhaps not the greatest game ever, was a wonderful technological showcase for what could be done on the Saturn.

With the much talked about *VF3* port (with or without upgrade cart) seemingly dead in the water, AM2 signed off from the Saturn in style with *Fighters MegaMix*. Based on the *Fighting Vipers 2* engine and gameplay mechanics, the game merged *VF2* and *Fighting Vipers* characters (along with assorted other AM2 characters) in a colossal fighting game that came very close to eclipsing *VF2*.

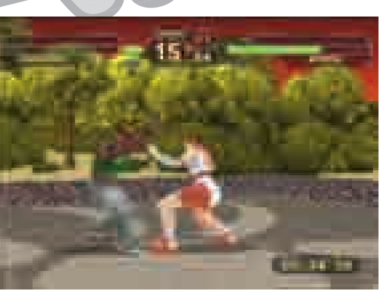
Likewise Lobotomy, who had pulled off the very impressive *Exhumed* the year before, was entrusted to port over PC hits *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Quake*, a task it proved more than capable of.

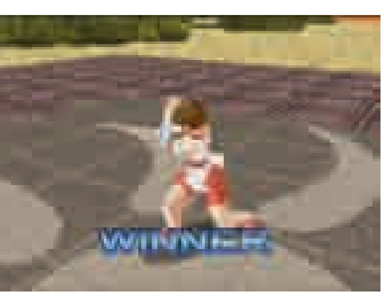
By the end of 1997, however, it became clear that Sega was done with the Saturn, with *Burning Rangers*, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* and *Shining Force III* the last games of note to be published by the company in 1998. However, this wasn't the end of things for the Saturn – at least in Japan. The machine's 2D power was more than capable of handling Neo Geo and CPS2 ports – especially when used in conjunction with RAM carts – allowing Capcom and SNK to port their more elaborate 2D games with a great degree of accuracy, while Tecmo was able to use the knowledge gathered by Sega to port across Model 2 game *Dead Or Alive*. Likewise, the availability of ST-V boards also meant that smaller companies like Treasure and Raizing could continue to find a home for their games in the console market. Sadly, very few of the games released during 1998 made it out in Europe or the States, forcing many dedicated fans to turn to importing to get their gaming fix.

THE HARDCORE CLASSIC

In its opening page (an article that is sadly not credited to its author) of the February 1997 issue, Sega Saturn Magazine states that 'Owning a Saturn is making a statement', and from a gamer's point of view, this is almost certainly true. There's no denying the ineptitude of Sega's management during this time; in virtually every conceivable way, the machine was at loggerheads with what the market wanted (and for the most part received, courtesy of the PlayStation), and arguably, the precarious financial position the Saturn left the company in along with the damage done to its reputation put its successor, the Dreamcast, on the back foot before it had even launched.

But equally, there's no denying the excellence of the console's games. With the arcade heritage of both Sega and its key third-parties, such as Capcom, SNK, Treasure, Raizing Tecmo and co (arguably at a time when they were all at their creative peak), it comes as scant





» While the *Dead Or Alive* games are a household name now, Tecmo's beat-'em-up started out its console life on the Saturn.



» Sonic Team's *NiGHTS* is for many people, the best game ever made – and with Sega's analogue pad, it's not hard to see why.



» The best of Capcom's 2D wares were vastly superior on the Saturn compared to their PlayStation namesakes.

surprise that the machine's best software tended to find its origins in the arcades. While it should be pointed out that very few of the games themselves are exclusive to the Saturn in the traditional sense – even Sega converted its big Saturn ports to the PC using its ill-fated Sega PC label – such is the gulf in quality between the Saturn and other home versions that for most arcade gamers, there was only ever one machine worth bothering with – all the more so considering that certain ports – such as the 'Big Three' – were arguably better games than their arcade parents.

That's not to say there wasn't a great array of console-specific titles. The offerings of Sonic Team and Team Andromeda spring instantly to mind, with *NiGHTS*, *Burning Rangers* and the *Panzer Dragoon* trilogy all demanding of a place in any self-respecting Saturn collection, along with the excellent *Shining* games (Team Sonic), *Guardian Heroes* and *Silhouette Mirage* (Treasure), along with many others.

Even today, despite the widespread availability of sequels and re-releases on other formats, the Sega Saturn is still a worthwhile investment for those who appreciate the unique gameplay styles of the companies that supported it; in terms of dedication to delivering the most faithful experiences possible (especially arcade ports), the machine is still arguably peerless to this day, a state-of-affairs reflected in the cult status it deserves.

As such, the market for the console remains buoyant to this day, nearly a decade on. While the abundance of unwanted PAL machines and games can make the machine an attractive prospect, be warned – those wishing to get the best out of the Saturn must be prepared to invest handsomely. While there are several fancy limited edition machines that were released in Japan, our recommendation would be to pick up a 'double switched' PAL machine, coming with region selection and 50/60Hz selection switches to enable you to play imported titles and (although thankfully few) poorly optimised PAL titles in all their full-screen, full-speed glory – such a machine won't cost much (indeed, it's possible to perform the modifications yourself using one of the many online tutorials), although some of the rarer and more desirable games can fetch top price these days, so be prepared to spend – certain titles can now fetch upwards of £150.

However, if the particular type of game offered by the Saturn is your cup of tea, then it's ultimately worth it. While it would be foolish to pretend that the Saturn was anything other than a failure in the business sense, there'll probably never be a machine quite like it.



» *Virtua Fighter* helped to fuel Saturn sales in Japan at launch, but was the only launch game of note.

NetLink me up

One of the least successful upgrades for the Saturn was its NetLink modem. Comprising of a 28.8 kb/s modem and browser software, the service allowed for internet browsing and online gaming, although in the event, it never took off; a few games – such as online enabled versions of *Sega Rally*, *Virtual On* and a few others – appeared, but the service never caught on and by the end of 1997, most developers had abandoned it in the USA and Japan, although that was one step further than it got in Europe; sensing that it would probably never catch on, Sega of Europe never released the modem or the software here.



GO EAST YOUNG MAN

While the Saturn had a tough time in the West it received plenty of support in Japan. Here are three of our favourite titles that never made it to Western shores.

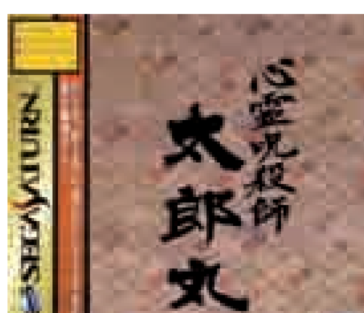
Title: Princess Crown
Developed by: Atlus
Everyone knows the Saturn was capable of incredible sprite based visuals, and *Princess Crown* is one such title, which highlights this fact. With multiple, enormous, fluidly animated characters moving and fighting each other all over the screen, it's enough to melt the eyeballs. Gameplay was equally excellent, with plenty of variety. Playing one of several characters' quests, you roamed a fantasy realm fighting dragons; goblins and other mythical creatures, using a unique *Street Fighter*-style combat system. You could also cook food to make healing items. Awesome.



Title: Dracula X: Nocturne in the Moonlight
Developer: Konami
Thanks to flagging sales in the West, Konami's *Nocturne in the Moonlight* never appeared outside Japan. Essentially a beefed up edition of *Symphony of the Night* (albeit with rougher looking visuals, slowdown and lengthy loading times) *Nocturne* allows you to start play as one of three different characters (including Saturn exclusive Maria), has plenty of new weapons and even two new locations, The Cursed Prison and Underground Garden, to discover. Worth playing through even if you have already played the superior PlayStation version.



Title: Psychic Killer Taroumaru
Developer: Time Warner Interactive
It may reach insanely high prices on eBay, but this superb effort from Time Warner Interactive easily justifies its £200+ asking price, if only so you can constantly gaze at its remarkable aesthetics. Filled with the sort of graphical trickery that wouldn't look out of place in a Treasure game, *Psychic Killer* is a stunning example of what capable designers could achieve with the Saturn's hardware. The game's not bad either, playing like a cross between early *Shinobi* games and *Alisa Dragoon*.



PERFECT TEN GAMES

Forget the fact that it was an alleged nightmare to program and that it came a poor second to Sony's all-conquering PlayStation, there is still much to discover on Sega's (unfairly) maligned console. Featuring both jaw-dropping 3D titles and an eclectic range of 2D games, Sega's Saturn quite frankly has something for everyone.



01

NiGHTS INTO DREAMS

- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** SONIC TEAM
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BURNING RANGERS

01 **It's difficult choosing just one of Sonic Team's Saturn titles, and we debated endlessly over this or *Burning Rangers*, but as *NiGHTS* is so unlike anything else, and came out first, it had to go in.** The gameplay basically involves flying around a pseudo-3D world, passing through rings to open the level exit. The atmosphere is surreal, but to reach that euphoric state you need to master the art of infinite looping: passing through rings quick enough to maintain the timer and effectively loop the level several times while generating insane scores. It doesn't click for everyone, but if your mind is expanded enough it's magical. Also, don't forget *Christmas NiGHTS*!

SATURN BOMBERMAN

- » **RELEASED:** 1997
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** HUDSON
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ADVENTURE ISLAND

02 ***Bomberman* is one of the greatest series ever created, and *Saturn Bomberman* is the pinnacle of the series. Every single post-Saturn iteration of the franchise generates the question: is it as good as *Saturn Bomberman*? None are.** The big reason is it's the only version supporting ten simultaneous players, on a single screen, which is pure nirvana. Another thing is, while most *Bomberman* games are fairly boring in single-player, the Saturn's solo mode is equally as good as the multiplayer. Beautiful animé cutscenes, ingenious level design, interesting enemies and power-ups – whether alone or in a group, *Saturn Bomberman* is awesome.



02

GUARDIAN HEROES

- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** TREASURE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GUNSTAR HEROS

03 **No other system at the time could do 2D like the Saturn could, and the game exemplifying this was *Guardian Heroes*.** Unlike *Final Fight* which had a variable plane of movement *Heroes* only had three-planes, where movement was restricted to left-and-right, with players needing to alternate between them. It ensured the fighting engine was precise, well defined, and unlike anything else. Treasure also blessed it with a fantastic animé intro, and dozens of frames of super-liquid-smooth animation. Then there was the ability to collect extra characters to fight as, and even control a powerful undead warrior. Pure genius.

SHINING FORCE III

- » **RELEASED:** 1997
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** CAMELOT
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MARIO TENNIS

04 **The *Shining* series has always been a favourite among Sega stalwarts and, after the Saturn's first-person-perspective *Shining The Holy Ark*, fans rejoiced that the series would return to its Strategy RPG roots for the first time in 3D.** The basic mechanics weren't a drastic departure from past instalments, but there were several additions, such as the friendship system. Unfortunately, for all its excellence, it is also a source of annoyance for the Saturn community. Only the first of the proposed three-disc set was translated into English, with the second two only in Japanese.

PANZER DRAGOON II: ZWEI

- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** TEAM ANDROMEDA
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

05 **We've already covered *Saga* under Why You Must Play, but *Zwei* is such a different experience, it's worth including another *Panzer* game.** It's an on-rails shooter, which blends an unusual storyline and ethereal atmosphere with some intense action. Unlike contemporaries such as *Starfox*, *Zwei* allowed the camera to be panned all around the dragon mount, and therefore fire at enemies coming from all directions. It also improved on the first by providing a devastating berserker attack. *Zwei* is remembered best for its wild set pieces and epic bosses.



03



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08

SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

- » **RELEASED:** 1995 (UK 1996)
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** AM3/CS TEAM
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MANX TT SUPERBIKE

06 ***Sega Rally* might have only had three cars and four circuits, but thanks to its endless time attack options we're still struggling to put it down.** The key to *Rally's* brilliance lay in its circuit design and handling. Singularly excellent, the two complimented each other to offer a game that was convincing to play, but thanks to a variety of different lines that could be taken through most corners and the precision needed to balance the cars on the edge, knowing that there was another tenth lurking in a given sector would keep you coming back for more.

VIRTUA FIGHTER 2

- » **RELEASED:** 1995 (UK 1996)
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** AM2
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DAYTONA USA

07 **While the Saturn didn't lack decent 3D fighters, none of them could hold a candle to *VF2*.** While it wasn't the most accessible game to grace the console (arguably its only weakness), *VF2's* perfectly weighted controls, fluid animation and sheer depth really set the game aside – and the stunning high resolution, 60 fps visuals only helped to sweeten the deal. While the AI was competent enough, *VF2* was always best enjoyed with a friend of roughly comparable quality, where learning a character and devising tactics accordingly in order to beat them became the order of the day – and it still plays like a dream now.

VIRTUA COP

- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** AM2
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** OUTRUN, SPACE HARRIER

08 **Prior to *Virtua Cop*, the light gun game had been stuck in the doldrums. However, Yu Suzuki's AM2 team saw the chance to revive it in 1994, and thus *Virtua Cop* was born.** The port is about as faithful as you could hope, with all of the enemy attack patterns and locations recreated. While the game might seem sedate now – especially compared to the various instalments of *Time Crisis* or *House Of The Dead* – the score attack based gameplay that rewarded justice shots (shooting an enemy's hand, rather than killing him), the depth this allowed for was stunning, and still worth playing to this day.



09

RADIANT SILVERGUN

- » **RELEASED:** 1998
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ESP
- » **CREATED BY:** TREASURE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SILHOUETTE MIRAGE

09 **There's a host of outstanding shoot-'em-ups on the Saturn, and while it's somewhat predictable that we've plumped for Treasure's opus, it so deserves to be here.** Ported from the Arcade S-TV board, *Radiant Silvergun* is quite simple the pinnacle of Saturn shmups and is one of the most exhilarating shooters we've ever played. Beautiful in design, with an ingenious weapon system – you instantly start with a fully powered-up ship and must use the weapons to the best of your ability – *Radiant Silvergun* is a near flawless experience that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances. Yes it's essentially nothing more than a souped-up boss rush. But man, what a rush.

STREET FIGHTER ZERO 3

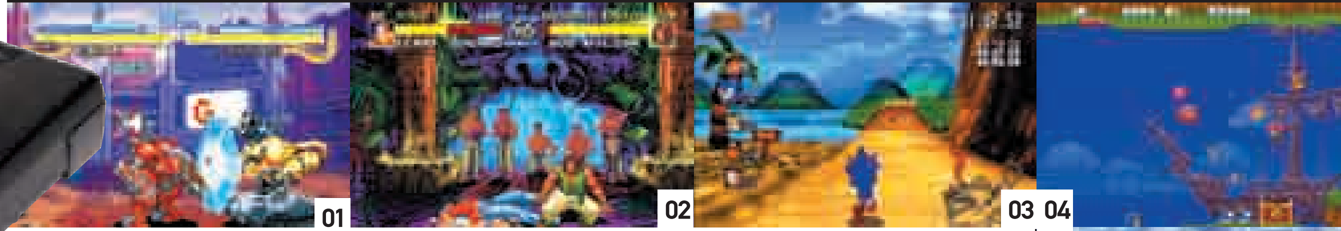
- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** CAPCOM
- » **CREATED BY:** CAPCOM
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STRIDER

10 **Capcom was one of the Saturn's staunchest supporters and as a result there are a host of great beat-'em-ups available on the machine.** While the likes of *X-Men Vs Street Fighter*, *Street Fighter Alpha 2* and *Marvel Vs Street Fighter* are all worthy of a mention, it's the Japanese-only *Street Fighter Zero 3* that's made our coveted top ten – mainly because, until very recently, it was the finest conversion of the game to ever appear on a home machine. That wasn't all though, as Capcom included all the arcade's extra gameplay modes and a console exclusive "World Tour" to ensure that arcade veterans had plenty to sink their teeth into.



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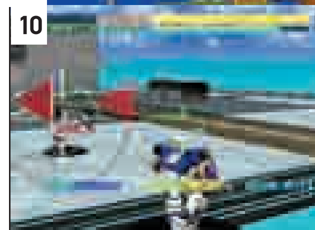




01 02 03 04

SEGA SATURN
and the rest...

Sega's Saturn was one of the last bastions of 2D, and, as a result, was home to a great many shooters and beat-'em-ups. However, it was also more than adept with other genres, as the following two pages show.



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16 17 18 19 25 26 27 28 34 35 36 37 43 44 45 46 52 53 54 55 61 62 63 64 70 71 72 73 79 80 81 82

01 CYBERBOTS
02 FATAL FURY 3
03 SONIC R
04 PARODIUS
05 GUARDIAN HEROES
06 PRIMAL RAGE
07 ATHLETE KINGS
08 MARVEL SUPERHEROES
09 SHINING FORCE III
10 VIRTUAL ON
11 PANZER DRAGOON
12 BLAZING TORNADO
13 THE KING OF FIGHTERS 96
14 SEGA AGES
15 METAL BLACK
16 CLOCKWORK KNIGHT 2
17 ASTAL
18 LAST BRONX
19 SAMURAI SHODOWN III
20 VIRTUA COP
21 MANX TT
22 DAYTONA USA
23 MARVEL VS STREET FIGHTER
24 SHINING WISDOM
25 LAYER SECTION
26 ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS
27 SCORCHER
28 STRIKERS 1945
29 MYST
30 SUPER PUZZLE FIGHTER
31 METAL SLUG
32 STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 2
33 VIRTUA FIGHTER 2
34 SONIC JAM
35 STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE
36 PANZER DRAGOON SAGA
37 GALAXY FIGHT
38 SEXY PARODIUS
39 WAKU WAKU 7
40 SEGA RALLY
41 ATLANTIS
42 POCKET FIGHTER
43 GRANDIA
44 SATURN BOMBERMAN
45 STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3
46 THE NIGHT WARRIORS
47 PARODIUS FOREVER WITH ME
48 NIGHTS INTO DREAMS
49 SHINOBI X
50 THUNDER FORCE AC
51 VIRTUA COP 2
52 ALIEN TRILOGY
53 IN THE HUNT
54 THE KING OF FIGHTERS 97
55 TITAN WARS
56 VIRTUA FIGHTER
57 SAMURAI SHODOWN IV
58 EXHUMED
59 TWINKLE STAR SPRITES
60 THREE WONDERS
61 STREET FIGHTER ALPHA
62 VIRTUA FIGHTER KIDS REMIX
63 SONIC 3D BLAST
64 REAL BOUT FATAL FURY
65 DEAD OR ALIVE
66 VIRTUAL HYDLIDE
67 BURNING RANGERS
68 VAMPIRE SAVIOUR
69 DUNGEONS & DRAGONS COLLECTION
70 STREET FIGHTER COLLECTION
71 VIRTUA RACING
72 RADIANT SILVERGUN
73 THE KING OF FIGHTERS 95
74 X-MEN VS STREET FIGHTER
75 WORLD SOCCER 97
76 CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
77 REAL BOUT FATAL FURY SPECIAL
78 VIRTUA FIGHTER REMIX
79 GUARDIAN FORCE
80 BUBBLE SYMPHONY
81 WINTER HEAT
83 BAKU BAKU
84 PANZER DRAGOON ZWEI
85 QUAKE
86 TOMB RAIDER
87 THEME PARK


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» It dawns on this poor man that his acting days are numbered following *Bug Blasters: The Exterminators*.

MEGA DEALS

Starting life as an online retailer of retro novelties, Good Deal Games soon became a publisher in its own right, with seven titles already under its belt. Taking a special interest in Sega CD games, Matthew Cockburn delves into the past, present and future of this exciting company and investigates what is involved in the arcane business of Retro Publishing…

By its very nature Retro Publishing relies on the discarded husks of games deemed commercially non-viable by everyone else. Of course, discovering prototypes from long-forgotten developers is nothing new. Simply point your nose towards the murky corners of the net and it's easy to discover prototype files, ROMS and ISOS of previously unreleased games. *Starfox 2* for the SNES and the notorious bootlegged *Thrill Kill* for the PlayStation join a host of other games leaked through unofficial channels years after their cancellation. A zealous collector is always on the hunt to discover more gaming relics, along with the prestige of owning an original prototype.

For Michael Thomasson, president of Good Deal Games, it's not about hoarding these prototypes for his own enjoyment. As he states, "GDG's primary mission is game preservation, and by releasing these unfinished projects to the public we definitely meet that goal. While I'm a collector at heart, I can't justify preventing others from playing a title that was originally meant for everyone to enjoy". An admirable statement that, in truth, rewards little financial gains from a console's aftermarket. Yet GDG supports a multitude of commercially rejected consoles, none more so than the Sega CD, which actually started with two unlikely games: *Bug Blasters: The Exterminators* and *Star Strike*. Both games were produced by Stargate Films for publication through Sony Imagesoft. Stargate has since evolved into an established digital production and visual effects studio credited with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* through to *Desperate Housewives*. As a global operation with studios based in Los Angeles, Vancouver and London it's surprising they even took an interest in Thomasson's proposed release of these games to a commercially dead market. As fate would have it they were just as curious about the project as Thomasson explains, "When I contacted Stargate Films, they didn't even have copies themselves. Part of the negotiating was that we supplied them with their own games". Back in these naive days it was common practise for developers to distribute work-in-progress or even completed games for review and potential coverage from the press before the official release date. Stargate was no exception as Thomasson reveals: "Both titles originated from an individual who received demonstration copies at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), the precursor to Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3)."

"GDG'S PRIMARY MISSION IS GAME PRESERVATION, BY RELEASING THESE UNFINISHED PROJECTS TO THE PUBLIC WE DEFINITELY MEET THAT GOAL" - MICHAEL THOMASSON, PRESIDENT OF GDG

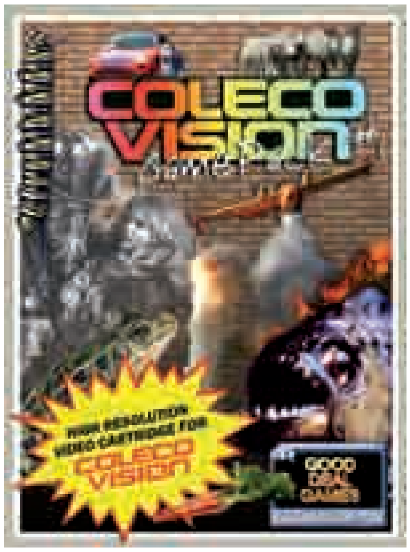
Following talks establishing a licence with Stargate Films paying a royalty on each sale, GDG smelt the air of conspiracy associated with the cancellation of both games. With Thomasson hinting at a wider strategy to undermine Sega's first venture into CD based gaming: "Stargate Films were furious with Sony. They did over $70,000 in work for each game, Sony bailed out and failed to pay a single cent." Apparently this happened to several developers; some survived and others folded as a direct result. Thomasson continues: "Sony was one of the lead publishers on Sega CD at that time. When the proposed SNES CD drive fell through with Nintendo it decided to release the device on their own. With Sony becoming a competitor to Sega in the PlayStation, it didn't want to be a supplier to the competition, so several projects were moved out-of-house and green-lighted projects to other developers that it had no intention of publishing". It's said this led to at least one disappointing holiday season, an important time in terms of sales for any platform.

MADE IN AMERICA

Conspiracy theories aside, GDG pressed on with a trickle of new games: *Citizen X* was released at the 2003 CGEXPO with the lost NTSC versions of *Battle Frenzy* and *Marko* making a debut the following year. It wasn't until GDG joined forces with Fonzie Voltnov from Evermind Development (www.genny4ever.net), a home-brew developer for the Genesis and Sega CD, that they started to get their hands dirty with some original game development. For inspiration they looked to the Dreamcast's *ChuChu Rocket!* and created *Mighty Mighty Missile!* Whilst only a clone, there are many changes and more importantly, additions as Fonzie details, "*MMM* includes two bonus games, *Cats Soccer* and *Mighty Snake* as unlockables. In reference to some *Sonic* games, I also added a cheat at the title screen to unlock all bonuses". To our surprise they were able to get more moving sprites on screen than any previous Sega CD game, a fact Fonzie is proud of, "It took time to design a system that allows up to 50 mice and 12 cats on screen at

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND!

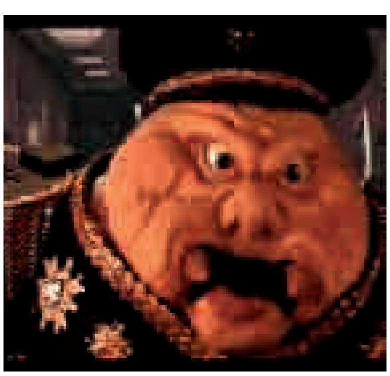
Good Deal Games has spread to every level of gaming imaginable. Arcade ambience music, original cartridge-based games including the Vectrex and Coleco Vision, even a game-based fiction book, *From Neptune To Earth* based on the classic game *Gyruss*. This obsession has also touched Panasonic's 3DO with two as yet unreleased prototypes of *Complete Onside Soccer* and *Powerslide*, both developed by the UK-based developer Elite. Unfortunately in their current state neither will play on regular consumer 3DO units as they lack the necessary encryption. With Good Deal Games attempting to decipher this code for years it seems that these will fall by the wayside. When Michael Thomasson's not hacking code or writing books he spends time as a historian for MTV's VideoMODS: a series combining videogame worlds with the music industry and the only place your likely to find Darth Vader strumming a guitar to Foo Fighters!

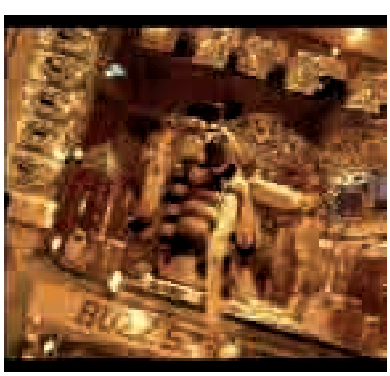


once, running at a smooth 60fps – especially considering collision-detection and interaction with arrows and walls on top of the sprites sapping CPU power from the Sega CD". So, while the game itself is rather simple, it's a great display of the untapped processing power of the Sega CD.

While for the most part these games were nurtured beyond the gaze of public attention, *Burning Fists*, a tournament brawler, proved to be quite a spectacle for the retrogaming community. First announced through the respected Digital Press Forums (www.digitpress.com) the game was offered for the princely sum of $1,500 from a French user known as Adol. Consisting of two prototype Mega CD discs, we asked Adol for more details, "One was a near-finished game, in English and named *Burning Fists*. The other was a Japanese version going by the name *Force Striker* that was way less complete than *Burning Fists*, but did contain a nice intro sequence missing from the latter". Following a public plea to co-publish *Burning Fists* if GDG could work out all the legal issues, J2 Games (www.j2games.com) answered the call and formed a partnership for a joint release.

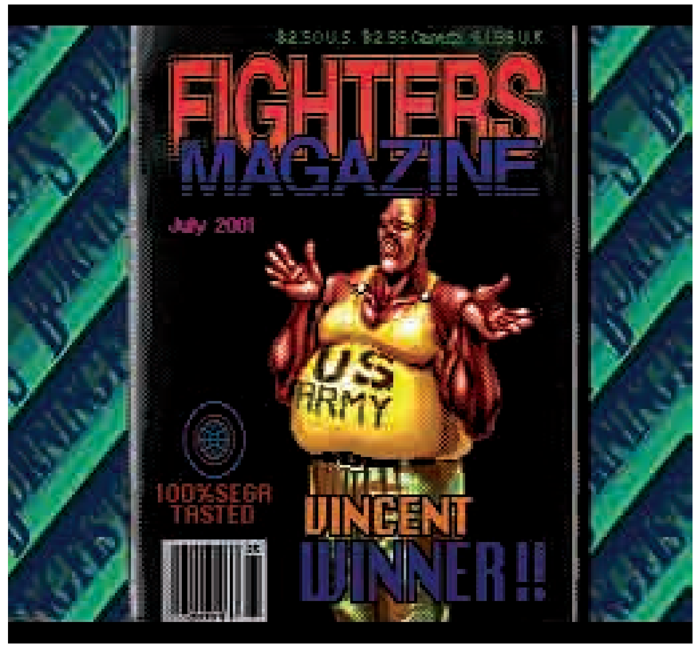
Legal turmoil was the least of its problems as in its current state the prototype was below the standards required for a GDG release, as Thomasson described, "*Burning Fists* was about 70 - 80% complete. It was missing the final boss, the full-motion video was running at about four frames per-second and had several bugs, the menu system was corrupt, and the one-player computer artificial intelligence was quite, well, stupid". Using the expertise of Evermind Development, *Burning Fists* was brought to a reasonable stage of completion with Fonzie getting the FMV running at a respectable rate, reworking the menu system and even modifying the AI to a competent level giving a decent opponent in one-player mode. Although a few bugs remained that have no ill effect on gameplay, as Thomasson explained, "We were able to address all of the bugs except for two. On the *Daytona* level, a dragster sometimes drives off leaving the sprite graphic of the back wheel intact on screen. The other bug or feature is that the Denmark background was not created. We tried adding our own background level graphics, but didn't succeed. So if a player chooses to play the Denmark stage, it will send the match to Seattle.





» No, it's not a visit to your aunt Glad, it's General Grub, commander and chief of the bug army.

» There's more to Good Deal Games than just Sega CD with a whole score of other gaming-related paraphernalia including music, books and even this Coleco Vision game pack.



» The language department at Sega has a lot to answer for, as *Burning Fists* is apparently "100% SEGA TASTED"!

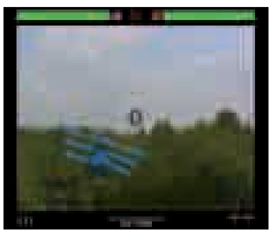
» Guile really should consider going on that slim fast diet plan in his latter years… unless it's Vincent from *Burning Fists*.



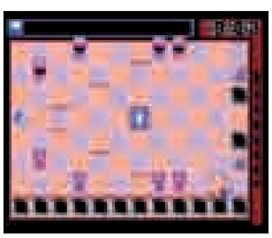
"TO OUR SURPRISE THEY WERE ABLE TO GET MORE MOVING SPRITES ON SCREEN THAN ANY PREVIOUS SEGA CD GAME" - FONZIE VOLTNOV

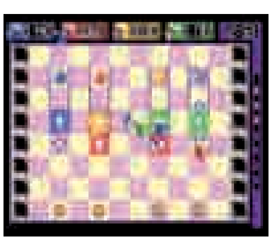
WING NUTS

As the sales pitch goes; 'It's World War I, and enemy Prussians have staged a surprise attack! *Wing Nuts* offers all the dogfights you love, without the frustration of flight simulation you hate. Drop into the cockpit and you're instantly off into the action. Viva la *Wing Nuts*! God save Belleville! Turn those enemy wieners into schnitzel!'. In the same ilk as *Star Strike* this is another FMV shooter. Although firmly clamped on rails, something typical of this genre, other innovative gameplay features have been introduced including a gun temperature gauge. Get to trigger-happy and you'll lock up the firing mechanism leaving your bi-plane wide open to attack. It's this attention to gameplay mechanics that made Stargate's FMV games stick out from the crowd adding a certain layer of strategy to an otherwise stale repetitive gaming experience.



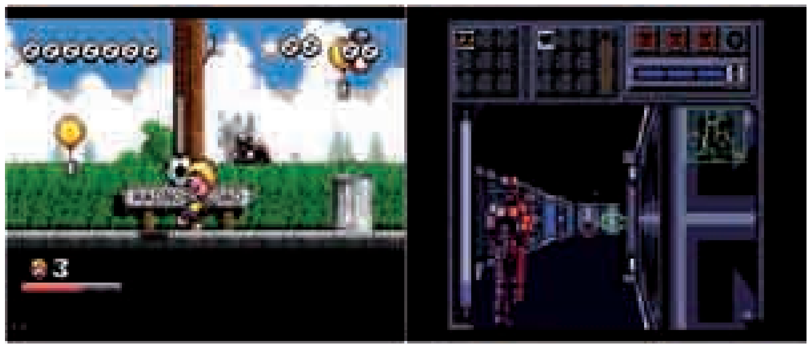
» *Wing Nuts* represents GDG's most ambitious project, converting the original PC CD-ROM version to Sega CD code.







» *Citizen X* has a few 'Boss Battles' if they can be called that, this one features a ninja that looks more like a beetroot-faced freak.



» *Marko* (left) and *Battle Frenzy* (right) marked a departure from GDG typical prototype games introducing the lost NTSC disks to America, while us Europeans had been enjoying our Mega CD versions for years.

Perhaps there's a Seattle in Denmark?"

NUTS & BOLTS

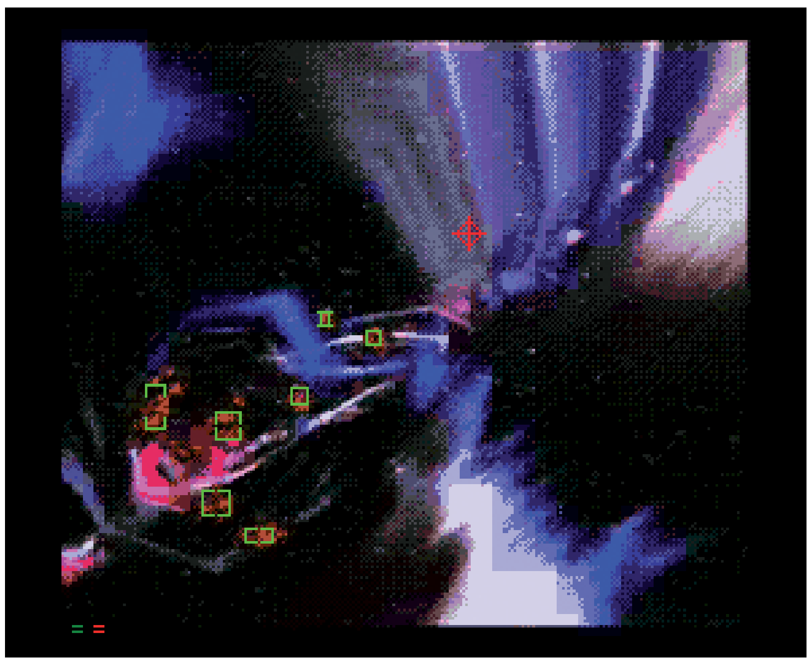
Looking toward the future of GDG it's fitting that we come full circle returning to the original Stargate Films licence, as Thomasson reveals exclusively to **Retro Gamer**. "When I contacted Stargate, they told me of another unreleased game called *Wing Nuts*. As part of the original deal they sent us a copy. We were very excited, but when the package arrived it turned out to be a DOS based PC version". After waiting six years, the Sega CD version, if it had ever been developed, has never surfaced. So with Evermind Development providing the technical expertise GDG has embarked on its most ambitious project to date: a complete conversion of the PC DOS version to a Sega CD compatible. Thomasson describes the process employed for this fascinating project: "Fonzie has designed a new codec procedure for creating full-motion video for the Sega CD which is superior to even the most advanced version used for games like *Midnight Raiders* and *Tomcat Alley*. Taking the PC version and extracting the full-motion video then programming the game for the Sega CD from scratch". With a grin he adds, "Of course, after all this hard work is completed, I'm sure that the long lost Sega CD version will magically appear! However, even if this is the case, the new process will make for a better quality game."

With a project such as *Wing Nuts* in the wind we presumed that was more than enough to keep GDG busy, until Thomasson proudly announced even more titles to us. "We also have two unnamed, totally original side-scrolling shooters in the vein of *R-Type* and *Thunder Force III* in development. One is about a year off, the other around two years in the making. A completely original FMV mini-game finished, built to test the waters for our upcoming *Wing Nuts* project, and of course, *Wing Nuts* itself".

Be it a stray prototype the odd clone or a patched up retro-bate, GDG has left no stone unturned and continues to innovate with its conversion of *Wing Nuts*, two original shooters in the works and a completed FMV mini-game. Can GDG possibly have anything else to offer us? With a wry smile Thomasson continues, "Well, we hope to find the Holy Grail of lost Sega CD. We have come across certain titles in development that we cannot obtain or afford the licensing rights to including *Time Cop* and *BattleTech*. With playable copies of both games, it's a real pity that we can't actually release them". A proven track record sets GDG aside from other Retro Publishers, as one to watch and any self-respecting Sega CD fan should visit www.gooddealgames.com to keep abreast of the latest and greatest that the platform has to offer. With decent emulation of the Sega CD through programs like 'Gens' there really is no excuse not to spend your New Year's money on some classic gaming.



» We could've captioned this screen from *MMM* as a game of cat and mouse, but we're far too inventive for such puns…

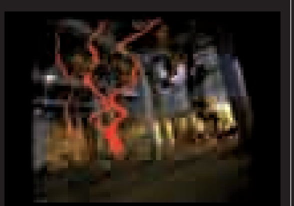


» Onslaught of an FMV asteroid field in *Star Strike*, where's R2D2 when you need him?

FIVE TO BUY

GOOD DEAL GAMES OFFERS PLENTY OF RETRO GAMES BUT WE'RE FOCUSING ON THE SEGA CD TITLES YOU SHOULD CONSIDER. PLEASE BE AWARE THAT CERTAIN GAMES ARE ONLY COMPATIBLE WITH AN NTSC CONSOLE.



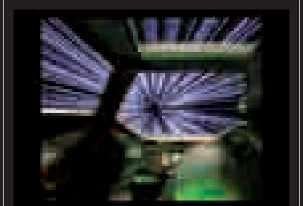
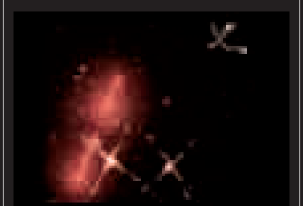



BUG BLASTERS: THE EXTERMINATORS

- **SYSTEM:** SEGA CD
- **GENRE:** FMV
- **PUBLISHER:** GOOD DEAL GAMES
- **PRICE:** $24.99

FMV games have always been a hot topic of discussion in the time-old argument of style over substance. Fortunately *Bug Blasters* lacks both of these with a cringe-worthy script comparable to budget horror films of the late-Eighties. It's so bad that this game is a must purchase for any retro gamer capable of playing Sega CD releases. Although the gameplay has the same slim pickings as any of its FMV predecessors, the progression of *Bug Blasters'* storyline will have you in hysterics. Featuring the likes of El'Roacho, a Mexican cockroach packing a 45 magnum, and king of the bugs General Grub out to crush humanity, if it's a bug you'll find it in *Bug Blasters.* Absolute comedy gold!

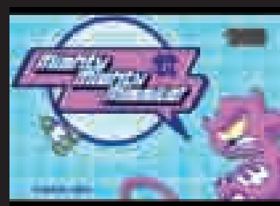
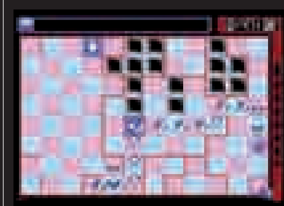


STAR STRIKE

- **SYSTEM:** SEGA CD
- **GENRE:** FMV
- **PUBLISHER:** GOOD DEAL GAMES
- **PRICE:** $34.99

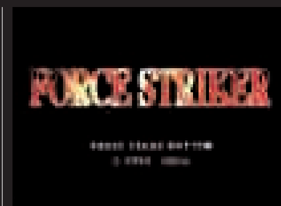
In another FMV game, *Star Strike* takes flight to an intergalactic battle of humans against badly-dressed aliens. The structure is less forgiving than *Bug Blasters,* with the game reverting you right back to square one if you fail the mission, it's still an engrossing space romp. Lightening-fast responses and a keen trigger-finger are a must. With a few nice touches including the start-up sequence, engaging your spacecraft's light speed engines and even an ejection system with a 50/50 chance of success. Given the repetitive video sequences it's odd that the experience as a whole feels expansive and fluid, owing much to the short transition time between video segments. The action never seems to let up; this is one FMV game worth further exploration.

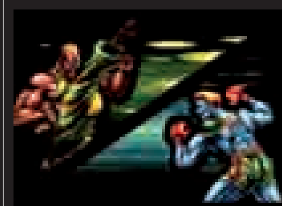




MIGHTY MIGHTY MISSILE!

- **SYSTEM:** SEGA CD
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE
- **PUBLISHER:** GOOD DEAL GAMES
- **PRICE:** $24.99 (NTSC ONLY)

If you hadn't already guessed from the title this is a clone of *ChuChu Rocket!* With a possible infestation of 60 mice the Sega CD hardware holds its own and maintains the frenetic pace of the Dreamcast original. Featuring 95 puzzle levels and up to four contenders in multiplayer action, not to mention extra unlockables throughout the game, there's plenty of gameplay to be had for *ChuChu Rocket!* novices in this homage. Although *Mighty Mighty Missile!* offers nothing particularly new to veterans, fortunately you can try before you buy with a demo. Check out the developer's website www.genny4ever.net for a free sample of what's on offer.



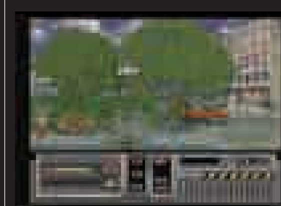



BURNING FISTS: FORCE STRIKER

- **SYSTEM:** SEGA CD
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **PUBLISHER:** GOOD DEAL GAMES
- **PRICE:** $34.99 (NTSC ONLY)

Street Fighter II it ain't, still, it's easy to recognise the game's influence over *Burning Fists,* including Chun Li spin-off Shi San. Despite the clichéd characters it stands out as a colourful fighter with lush backdrops and enough challenge to keep Joe public entertained, although the hardcore contingent amongst us would probably breeze through it in half an hour. To their credit both J2 and Good Deal Games promote *Burning Fists: Force Strikers'* strength as a two-player experience over the single-player game. Slap the game in your CD-ROM for some hidden extras including an introduction sequence complete with Japanese narration that was cut from the final release.



CITIZEN X

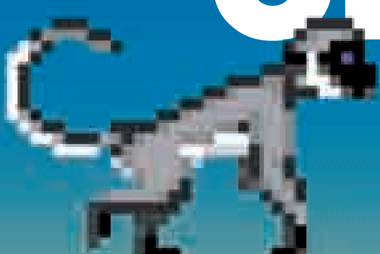
- **SYSTEM:** SEGA CD
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **PUBLISHER:** GOOD DEAL GAMES
- **PRICE:** $14.99 (NTSC ONLY)

Diseased sewer rats, psychotic circus clowns, mafia hitmen, cannibalistic martial arts masters… it's just an hour's work for Citizen X. It's the usual megalomaniac terrorist story where you must race against time to find the antidote to save mankind. Short-lived but offering plenty of variation at its core, this is a maze platform game with inventory management interspersed with fighting and the occasional video feed. Worth specific mention for the outlandish characters and acting that ensues from the jingoistic American CIA agent, to the aforementioned cannibalistic ninja! Although certainly the weakest out of GDG's strong line-up of Sega CD games, it's hard to resist the bargain-basement price tag attached.



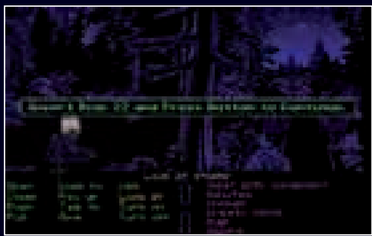
THE MAKING OF...

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

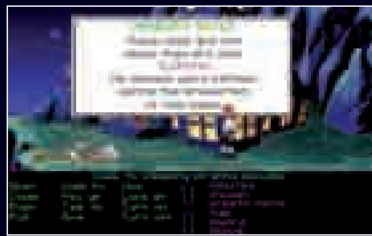




What do you get when you cross sword fighting with pirates, monkeys and a rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle? Kim Wild dons a pirate hat and eye patch to chat with Ron Gilbert and Dave Grossman about their swashbuckling classic.



» The stump joke, although in the floppy versions, was removed from CD-ROM to prevent even more confusion.

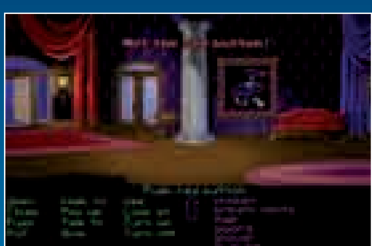


» Ron Gilbert's love of movies shows through with the disclaimer above.



T*he Secret Of Monkey Island* is one title that comes to mind as being one of the all time classics of adventure gaming. Stuffed with logical puzzles, offbeat humour, sword fighting and some truly memorable characters, *Monkey Island* is a prime example of how to create an adventure that can stand the test of time.

It would be some time from Ron Gilbert's arrival at LucasFilm Games before *Monkey Island* would begin development. To begin with, Gilbert's main role was that of the humble conversion. "My first job in the industry was with a company called Human Engineered Software where I was doing C64 programming," remarks Gilbert. "They went bankrupt only a few months after I started. I spent about six months looking for a job and was about ready to go back to school when I got a call from someone at LucasFilm. They were looking for someone to convert the Atari games they were doing for the C64." Dave Grossman's entrance into the videogame industry would occur much later and was something that occurred entirely by accident. "I was a graduate school refugee looking for something to do that was interesting without being morally reprehensible. I wasn't specifically trying to get into computer games or anything, but when I saw the ad I thought "Ooo! Yeah!" All of a sudden I was glad I hadn't gotten any of the other jobs I'd interviewed for over the preceding six months."

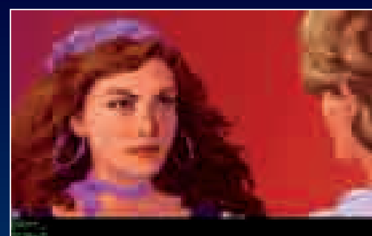


» Only a red button could strike pure dread into the hearts of pirates everywhere. Either that or the gophers.

After the conversion had been completed, Ron Gilbert teamed up with Gary Winnick to create the first LucasFilm point-and-click title, *Maniac Mansion*. It would be this game that would see the creation of SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*) – the engine which has been used in every LucasFilm/Arts adventure to date. The idea for SCUMM was borne out of Gilbert's hatred of typing "I hated playing adventure games where I had to type everything in, and I hated playing the "second guess the parser" game, so I figure everything should be point-and-click". Dave Grossman explains: "The SCUMM point-and-click interface was developed as an answer to the parser, which was what most graphic adventures used in the Eighties. Parsers let you try more or less any action you can think of, but most of us felt they were just too frustrating and slow to use, and that the limited ability to RESPOND to an infinite choice of actions showed the cracks in the fantasy too plainly. We tinkered with the interface with each new game, trying to make it as easy to use as possible, while still giving the player the means to specify a reasonable range of actions."

Although the system is now wholly owned by LucasArts, Gilbert feels that the secret of its success is still down to the quality of the games. "I think SCUMM has been successful because we built good games with it. Without the good games (and the silly name), no one would remember a piece of technology."

"WE WROTE THE SCRIPT AS WE WERE DOING THE PROGRAMMING. YOU COULD NOT DO THAT TODAY" RON GILBERT



» Guybrush realises the way to a woman's heart is not by chocolates but flattering her with his conversational skills.

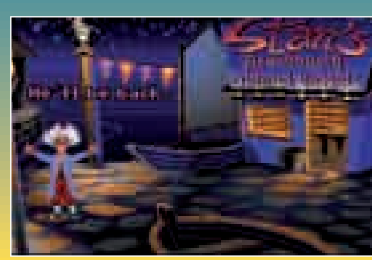
"MY NAME IS GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD AND I WANT TO BE A MIGHTY PIRATE!"

While Zak McKracken came along, Gilbert began to put together ideas for *Monkey Island*, but development was put on hold as LucasFilm assigned the team with making a game to tie in with the *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* movie. This proved to be incredibly beneficial, as many of the development lessons learned ensured that *Monkey Island* was a more coherent game. "I did *Monkey Island* after *Indy*, so there was a lot I learned from how the puzzles came together." explained Gilbert.

Once *Indy* had been completed, Gilbert was able to continue design on *Monkey Island*, which came from a "love of Pirates, mostly driven by the Disney ride, Pirates of the Caribbean. I also wanted to make a game that was kind of like fantasy, because it was popular, but I am not a huge fantasy fan. Pirates seemed like a good compromise." To begin with, the



» The underwater puzzle that is simple, but ingenious. Also the only place where Guybrush can die.



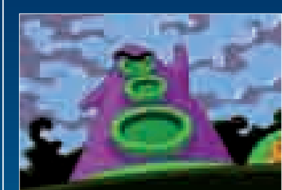
» Stan – used ship salesman, con merchant and all round animated guy – shows his deep love for Arnie.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION
SYSTEMS: C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC
YEAR: 1989

DAY OF THE TENTACLE
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 1993

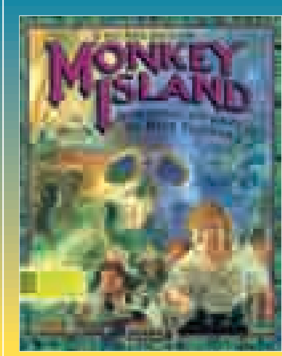
SAM AND MAX: HIT THE ROAD
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 1993



IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE GAME
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10



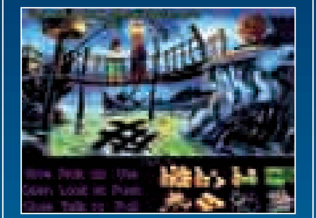
THE MAKING OF...

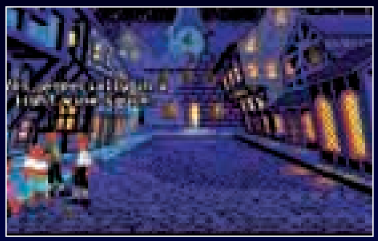
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

"I GOT SICK OF PLAYING ADVENTURE GAMES WHERE YOU DIED WHEN YOU DID ANYTHING WRONG" RON GILBERT

LOOK BEHIND YOU: A THREE-HEADED MONKEY!

In 1991, a sequel was released in the form of *LeChuck's Revenge*, a game that expanded upon the original in every department. However, one area that has been particularly hard for fans to accept is the controversial cliffhanger ending, which Dave Grossman reflects "references *The Empire Strikes Back* rather heavily". Although follow-up title *Curse Of Monkey Island* did an admirable job of providing an explanation as to what happened to Guybrush and LeChuck, the fact that the game was developed by a different team means that many fans still hanker after the "real" *Monkey Island 3*. However, Ron Gilbert hopes that one day he will once again regain the rights to the series and finish the trilogy once and for all. "The secret will be revealed. If I get to make another *Monkey Island*, it will be called "Monkey Island 3a: The Secret Revealed or your Money Back."





» The original PC EGA version only used 16 colours, an incredible use of the limited technology.



» Bribery really is the key to becoming a mighty pirate. Failing that, violence solves everything.

main protagonist remained nameless and his humorous name came as a result of a graphics file. Steve Purcell, who worked as an animator, was using Dpaint to create the characters and saved the picture of our hero as a "guy". Selecting a file within the program calls it a "brush", so the picture would often be saved as guybrush and the name stuck. Threepwood was decided as a result of a company competition. General Manager Steve Arnold really liked "Chuck" and had wanted a character with this name to feature in a game, so Threepwood's nemesis "LeChuck" was born.

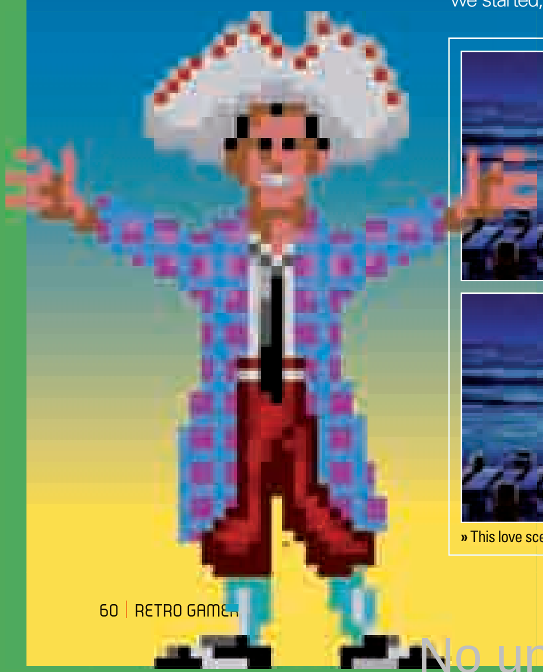
Monkey Island's unique blocky style was down to hardware limitations rather than conscious design. The original PC version was comprised of 16 colours at 320x200 resolution, which meant that the design had to be simplistic. "If we had better hardware to do graphics, they would have looked better. But that lack of high-end graphics really causes you to focus on the game and story more," continues Gilbert.

"I CAN BREATHE UNDERWATER FOR TEN MINUTES!"

"I had most of the main puzzles done before we started," explains Gilbert. "I'd just start drawing boxes on a piece of paper, connecting all the "locks" and "keys". Once production started, Tim, Dave and I would hang out and brainstorm all the little pieces and fine-tune things that were not working." Grossman explains a little more about his role: "My job in the early days, on the *Monkey* games, was mostly about details – telling characters where to walk, writing scenes and dialogue for them, helping design strings of puzzles, and making sure the cliffs crumbled on cue while Ron Gilbert kept track of the big picture. It was like an apprenticeship (you know, no pay but you learn a lot), and after a couple of years Tim Schafer and I took charge of our own project, *Day Of The Tentacle*. We still did most of the writing, though, because we liked to."

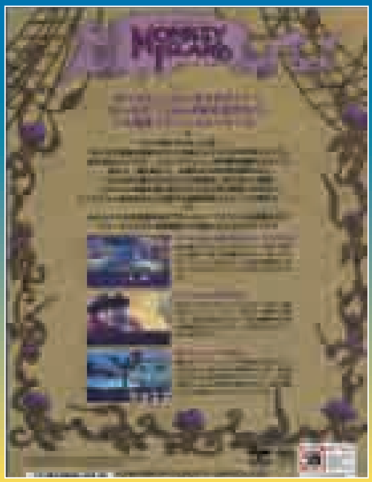
One of the most memorable puzzles is that of insult sword fighting (see boxout). This once again came from Gilbert's love of movies. "I was inspired a lot by movies. I love movies and back then I would go to the theatre several times a week. When I am designing, I also spend a lot of time driving and listening to music. When designing *Money Island*, I watched a lot of old pirate movies, and they always spent more time in a sword fight talking to each other then actually fighting. So I figured that would be an interesting gameplay system. Also, if you're going to do a pirate game, there has to be sword fighting, but back then adventure gamesplayers hated any action in their games, so doing this turned it into a (funny) puzzle."

What makes the puzzles more pleasurable is that the player can explore the game freely without death lurking around every corner. With *Monkey Island* (with the exception of depriving Guybrush of oxygen





» This love scene will only take place if you DON'T complete the other two trials first.



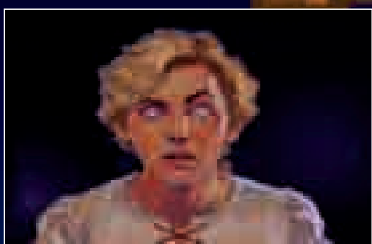
» FM Towns console had a port of the CD-ROM version (packshot courtesy of http://lucasarts.vintagegaming.org).





"IT WAS LIKE AN APPRENTICESHIP (YOU KNOW, NO PAY BUT YOU LEARN A LOT)"

DAVE GROSSMAN



» Guybrush is horrified when he encounters the scariest beast to roam the earth since the dinosaur.

for more than ten minutes) it is impossible to die, placing the emphasis firmly on experimentation. "I got sick of playing (especially the Sierra) adventure games where you died any time you did anything wrong," explains Gilbert. "I felt like this was a cheap way out for the designer."

Inevitably there were elements that never made it into the final version. An amnesia plot for Guybrush Threepwood was dropped once his name was decided upon. Meathook initially gave the player three tasks before agreeing to join the crew for *Monkey Island*, but this was reduced to the funniest one as it was felt that there were too many for that section. Meanwhile, Herman Toothrot was added to make *Monkey Island* feel less uninhabited.

NEVER PAY MORE THAN 20 BUCKS FOR A COMPUTER GAME

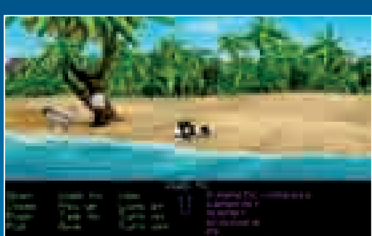
While the dialogue is entertaining, much of it was improvised as the game was developed. "We wrote the script as we were doing the programming. You could not do that today. You'd need to start with a script," comments Gilbert. "It was like snowboarding on a hill you haven't been down before. We couldn't see the bottom, but we knew where it was and had a basic plan for getting there. But the plan changed with each bump in the terrain," remarked Grossman. "A lot was either filled in or rethought as we went – the dialogue in particular, not a syllable of which had been written in advance."

Development for the sequel began almost immediately after the first and was critically acclaimed while also proving popular among the fan base. Unfortunately, Gilbert left before work could begin on the third game to complete the trilogy (see boxout). "I felt that I had grown to the point where I wanted to run my own company, so I started Humongous Entertainment and we made adventure and other games for kids." The third game, however, was well received by the *Monkey Island* programmers. "I don't know about the 3D version, I haven't played that one. I did play *Curse*, though, and I liked it. It was fun, and it felt *Monkey*ish," comments Grossman. Gilbert is equally positive, but speaks scathingly of the fourth outing. "I thought the writing was good and carried the tradition of the first two games. I did not like that Guybrush and Elaine got together. That wouldn't happen. I did not play *Escape From Monkey Island* for more than ten minutes. I could not get around the bad UI and character navigation."

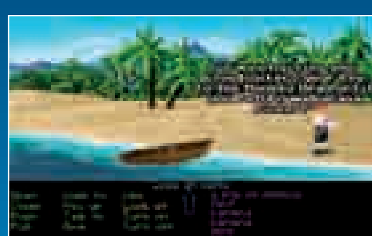
Even today, the success of *Monkey Island* is unexpected. "Those were the first games I ever worked on, so I didn't have the slightest idea what to expect," remarked Grossman. "I don't remember thinking about it at all while we were building the first one – I was just enjoying making it fun and making it funny, and it didn't really occur to me that, after we were finished, we were actually going to send it to stores where it would be seen by the public."

These days, Ron Gilbert remains on the outskirts of the industry working on his own game ideas and entertaining us all with his personal blog Grumpy Gamer (http://grumpygamer.com). Dave Grossman now works with adventure company TellTale Games (http://www.telltalegames.com) who have just recently released the first episode for the new *Sam & Max* series, which comes highly recommended.

Of course it wouldn't be a proper article without asking the immortal question: just what is the Secret of Monkey Island? While Ron Gilbert just laughs the question off, it's Dave Grossman's remark that fittingly ends this piece. "If I told you, the trained weevils would come for me."



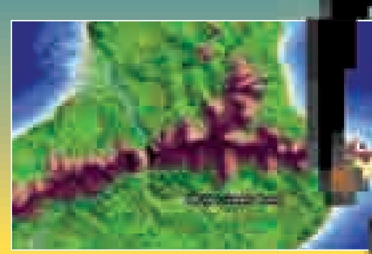
» A cheeky monkey helps himself to some fruit while Threepwood lies unconscious on the beach.



» Monkey heads. Banana pickers. Just what the hell is going on in this crazy game?



» Look behind you, it's a three-headed monkey!



» This overhead map shows locations you have visited.

HOW APPROPRIATE, YOU FIGHT LIKE A COW

Sword-fighting insults is one of the most memorable aspects of the game. Here we have collated together some cutting remarks worthy of any mighty pirate.

I got this scar on my face during a mighty struggle!
I hope now you've learned to stop picking your nose.

Have you stopped wearing diapers yet?
Why, did you want to borrow one?

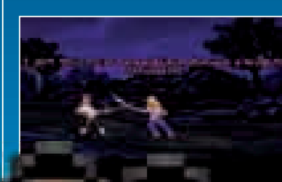
I have spoken with apes more polite than you.
I'm glad to hear you attended your family reunion.

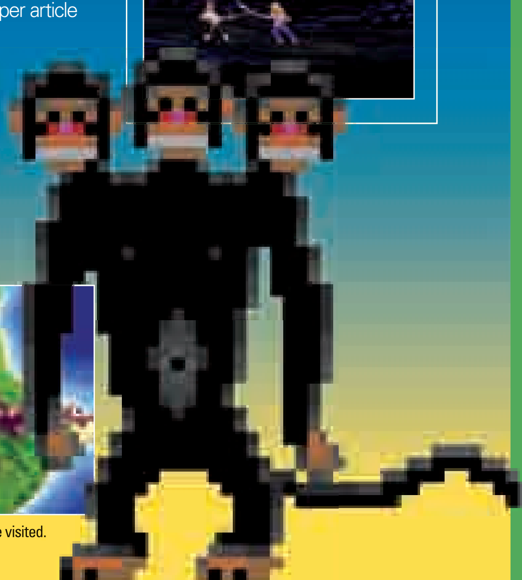
There are no words for how disgusting you are.
Yes there are. You just never learned them.

People fall at my feet when they see me coming.
Even BEFORE they smell your breath?

You're no match for my brains you poor fool.
I'd be in real trouble if you ever used them.

Soon you'll be wearing my sword like a shish kebab!
First you better stop waving it like a feather duster.





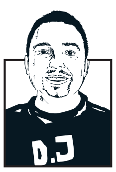


CASTLE OF ILLUSION

SCREW FANTASIA, HERE'S THE REAL DEAL



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+



HISTORY

After ripping into the vomit-inducing *Fantasia* last month, we felt it was only fair to restore peace to the affronted Mickey Mouse videogame community.

Despite arriving early on in the console's life, it's quite astonishing to realise that Mickey's very first Mega Drive outing remains one of the greatest platformers ever to appear on the 16-bit console.

Just look at this screenshot. Back in 1990 this was cutting edge stuff, and even today it manages to hold its own against more recent platformers. Mickey is a masterpiece in sprite design, and while his animation routines now look a little ropey, he's still filled with more charm and character than a dozen Ratchet and Clanks. Indeed, when *Castle Of Illusion* first appeared it was so impressive that you could have sworn you were taking part in an interactive cartoon, such was its beauty.

Outstanding graphics told only half the story, as, with saccharine soundtrack in tow, *Castle Of Illusion* presented you with some of the finest level design around. Granted it wasn't a tough game to complete, but the beautifully crafted stages ensured that you wanted to return to them again and again and again. But then, Sega had crammed so much variety into each and every stage that you just had to revisit them – if only so you could take everything in.

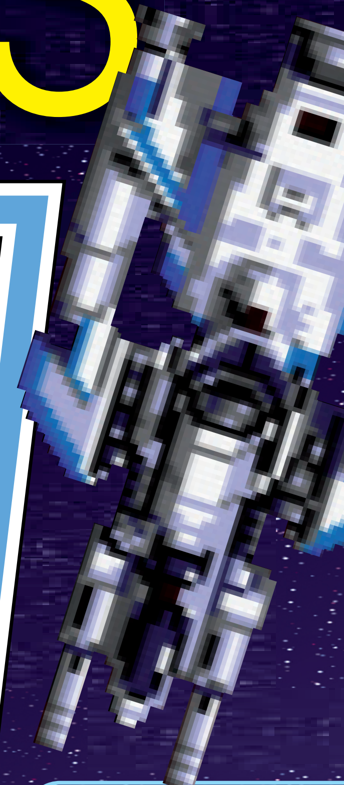
For example, one minute you're being chased down a hill by a huge apple, the next you're leaping into a giant's cup of tea and swimming around in the hot brew, while later stages saw you swinging from light switches, taking massive leaps of faith over immense holes and daintily stepping past cute spiders whilst making your way through the cobweb-infested level that we've shown here.

Crikey, we've run out of space and haven't even had a chance to cover *Castle Of Illusion*'s many bosses. Just take our word for it that they are as challenging as they are inventive. Enough already, just play the damn thing and wash away those *Fantasia* memories forever.





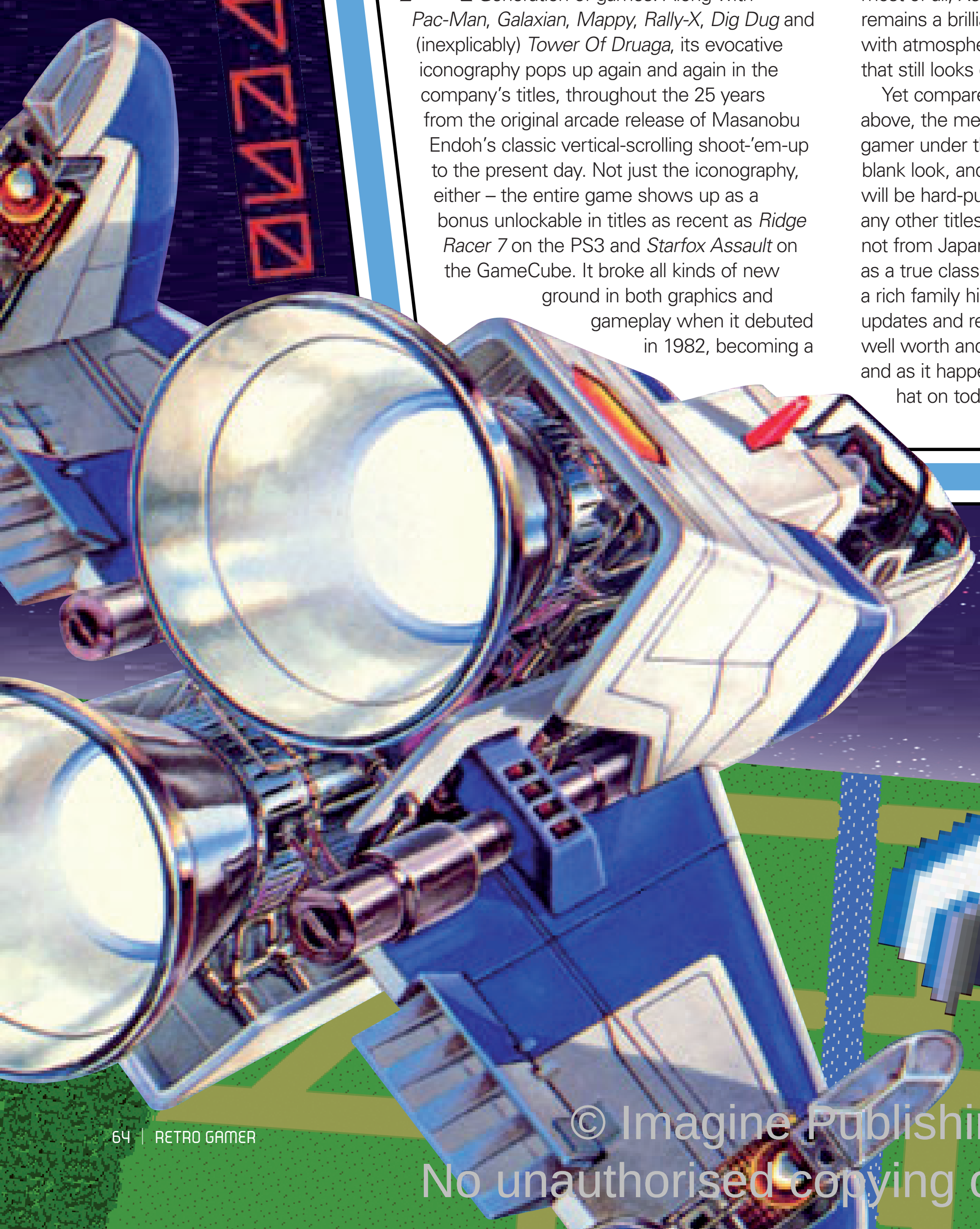
THE DEFINITIVE XEVIOUS

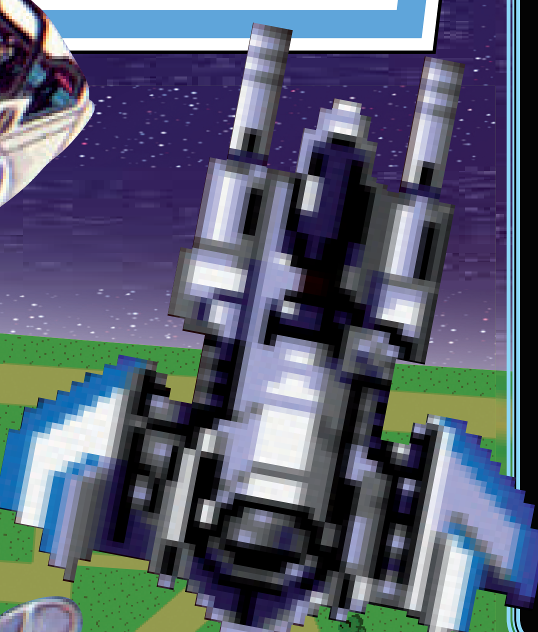


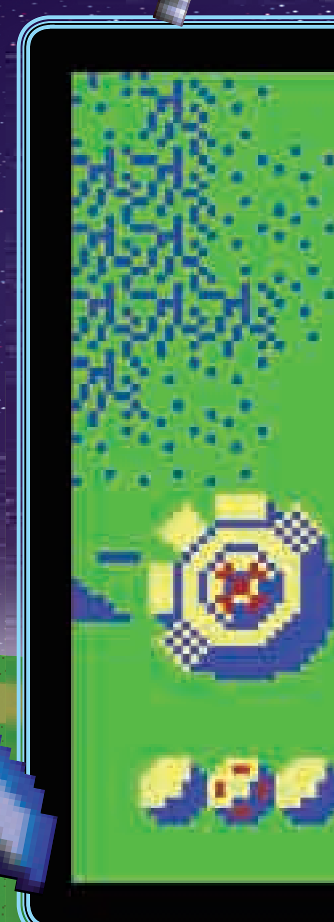
STUART CAMPBELL LOVES WRITING DEFINITIVE GUIDES, AND HE LOVES XEVIOUS. AN OBVIOUS COURSE OF ACTION SEEMED TO PRESENT ITSELF.

Xevious (pronounced "ZEE-vee-uss" to rhyme with "devious", not "ex-EE-vee-uss") is one of Namco's Golden Generation of games. Along with *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian*, *Mappy*, *Rally-X*, *Dig Dug* and (inexplicably) *Tower Of Druaga*, its evocative iconography pops up again and again in the company's titles, throughout the 25 years from the original arcade release of Masanobu Endoh's classic vertical-scrolling shoot-'em-up to the present day. Not just the iconography, either – the entire game shows up as a bonus unlockable in titles as recent as *Ridge Racer 7* on the PS3 and *Starfox Assault* on the GameCube. It broke all kinds of new ground in both graphics and gameplay when it debuted in 1982, becoming a highly-successful and widely-ported coin-op, and provided foundations that are still in use in modern shmups like the *Raiden* series (see RG26). But most of all, *Xevious* is notable because it was and remains a brilliant and challenging game, loaded with atmosphere and a distinctive visual style that still looks good a quarter of a century on.

Yet compared to most of the games listed above, the mention of *Xevious* to the average gamer under the age of 30 will be met with a blank look, and even those who remember it will be hard-pushed to identify the existence of any other titles in the line (especially if they're not from Japan, where *Xevious* is celebrated as a true classic). But the game actually has a rich family history – full of sequels and updates and remakes and spin-offs – that's well worth and long overdue an investigation, and as it happens we've got our investigating hat on today. Investigate go!









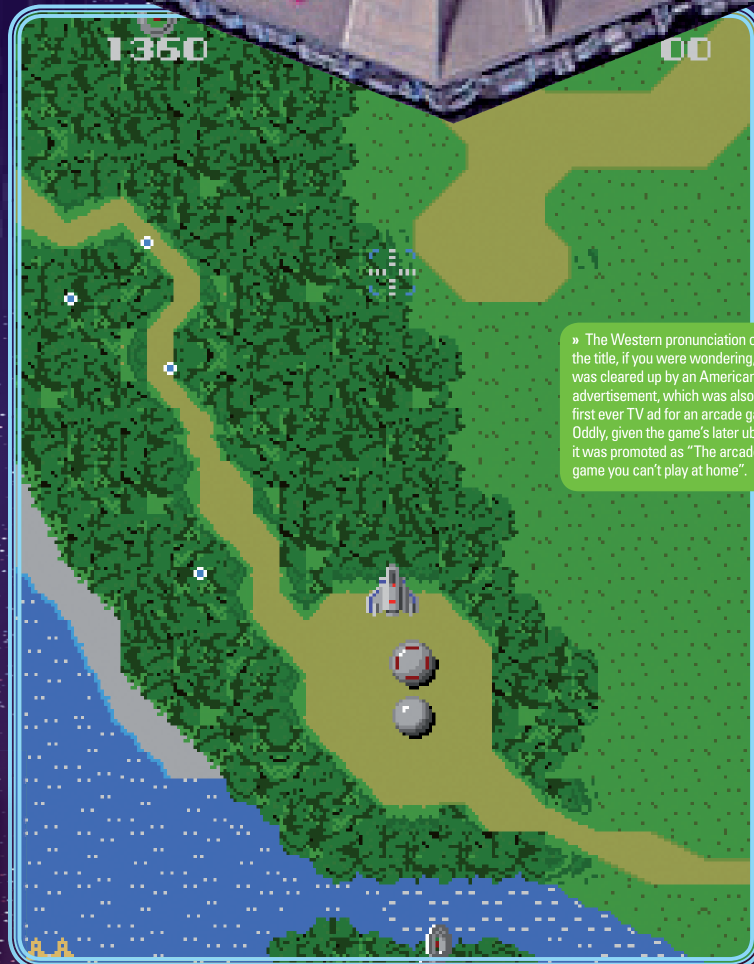
1982
XEVIOUS (ARCADE)

Not many people know the plot of *Xevious*, or indeed that it even has one. Set in 2012 (Yikes! Not long now!) around the famous real-life "Nazca lines" of Southern Peru, the convoluted tale depicts the fight against an ancient race of humans long departed from Earth, but now returning to claim their ancestral home under the control of a huge supercomputer called GAMP (General Artificial Matrix Producer). The storyline is explored very little in any of the games, but was actually the subject of both a novel (by Endoh himself) and a full-length animated movie in Japan, which was released on VHS videotape. Do drop RG a line if you ever stumble across a copy.

One of the game's most pioneering innovations was the behaviour of your enemies – where most scrolling shooters, both before and up to the present day, attack the player with incredibly dumb fixed formations which will happily follow each other straight into the line of your fire, the *Xevious* forces are intelligent individual craft, reluctant to get in front of your guns and prepared to retreat, veer off to the side or even sneak past you then attack from behind. This makes *Xevious* far more challenging than most shmups, without ever needing to fill the screen with hundreds of enemies and bullets – it gets extremely tough at about the 200,000 mark, and almost impossibly savage around 400,000, though eventually it simply loops back to the beginning. So little did Namco expect people to achieve such feats that if you keep looping and exceed the display limit of 9,999,990 points, the game crashes.

PLAY IT NOW ON: There were countless contemporary homeports of *Xevious* (the Sharp X68000 actually got two separate, slightly different ones), many of them barely recognisable as the same game (particularly the atrocious Speccy, C64 and Amstrad versions). But you can easily play the arcade-perfect version today on *Namco Museum 50th Anniversary* (PS2, Xbox, Gamecube, PC) or *Namco Museum Battle Collection* (PSP). There's even a surprisingly good mobile-phone port, which gets round the awkward-control issues by optionally automating both bombing and shooting. For no good reason the US NES version was retitled *Xevious: The Avenger*.





» The Western pronunciation of the title, if you were wondering, was cleared up by an American TV advertisement, which was also the first ever TV ad for an arcade game. Oddly, given the game's later ubiquity, it was promoted as "The arcade game you can't play at home".



» The PC-6001 version had guest appearances from both Pac-Man and red ghost Shadow.

1983
TINY XEVIOUS (PC-6001, MZ-700)

It doesn't take long, when examining the *Xevious* family tree, to fall out of the branches and into a world of hurt. *Xevious* was particularly popular in Japan, and any halfway-dedicated retro gamer knows that the home computer scene in Japan in the early Eighties is a baffling and daunting labyrinth of weird and often extremely primitive micros with names full of Zs and Xs. Nothing even approaching an authentic port of the coin-op was possible on these limited, blocky machines, so Namco (in association with a company called Dempa) came up with an entirely new game that the hardware could cope with. It's sort of like a remix of the original, with random combinations of enemies and ground targets thrown in (to the point where even the Andor Genesis mothership is sometimes accompanied by attacking ground bases, which never happens in the coin-op), but it captures the essential *Xevious* atmosphere pretty well. There was also a second incarnation, *Tiny Xevious Mk.II*, for the upgraded version of the PC-6001, which had superior graphics and stuck more closely to arcade *Xevious*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The emulator Virtual NEC Trek does a decent job of running *Tiny Xevious*. You'll need to set the memory to 16K and enter 2 when the boot screen asks you for the number of "pages"

1984

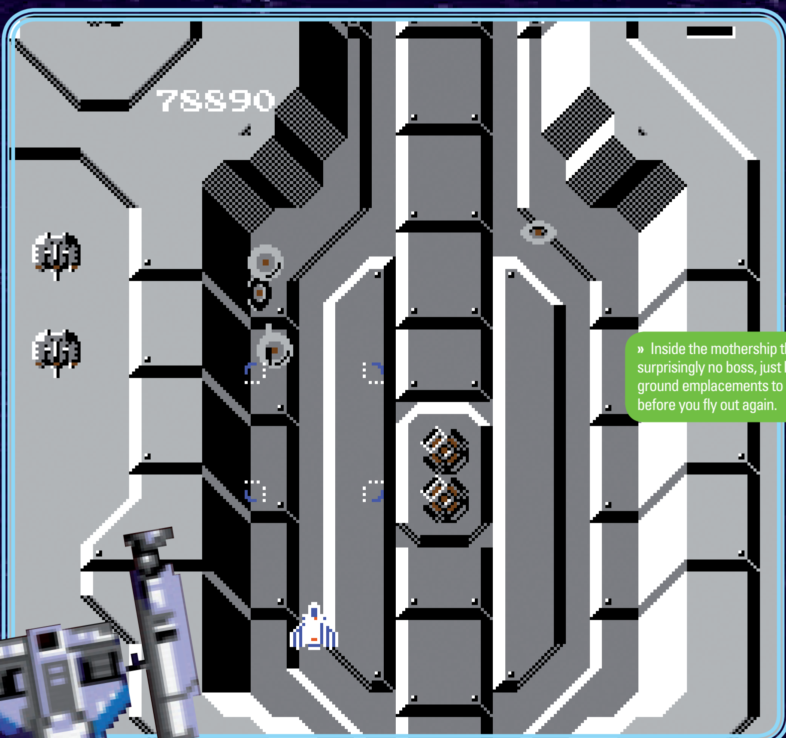
SUPER XEVIOUS (ARCADE)

Astounded that people were managing to break the original game, Namco brought out an update in early 1984. Basically just a tweaked version with the difficulty bumped up, *Super* did introduce a few quirky little tricks, most notably in the various single craft – a tank, a jet fighter and a helicopter – which popped up at set points in the game and, if destroyed, rather evilly reset your score to zero. There's also a special cameo to watch out for from a few squadrons of *Galaxian* flagships, stylishly retooled in the game's silver-grey livery.

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME, or in *Xevious 3D/G+* for the PSone.



» To the left of your Solvalou, you can see a couple of the *Galaxian* flagships. The inset shows the *Xevious* version alongside the original from *Galaxian* transposed into *Xevious*' colour palette, so you can clearly see that it's the original ship with a new layer of armour plating.



» Inside the mothership there's surprisingly no boss, just lots of ground emplacements to bomb before you fly out again.

1985

SUPER XEVIOUS GAMP NO NAZO (NES)

Translating as 'The Riddle Of GAMP', this Japan-only NES game was the first true *Xevious* sequel (despite the name, it's not related to coin-op *Super Xevious*), and it expands the premise of the original considerably. The scenery is much more varied, comprised of small sections you keep looping round until you've performed the unspecified task required (the 'riddles' of the title), such as bombing every enemy, and there are power-ups like giant bombsights to collect (by shooting down captured ships in a kind of *Galaga* style, then carrying them around for a bit, then waiting for them to fly off and return to drop the power-ups for some reason). You can jump around the game world via warps, there are low-level strafing runs with no bombing, cave sections where you explode on entry, and you even get to attack the interior of the Andor Genesis (which, TARDIS-style, is much bigger on the inside). It's a bizarre game, complicated and confusing and mercilessly hard even before it starts pulling mean tricks like hiding enemy fighters underneath clouds. With no continues you'll need an awful lot of persistence if you're ever going to solve the riddle of what the heck's going on in *GAMP No Nazo*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: VirtuaNES.

1988

XEVIOUS FARDRAUT SAGA (MSX2)

Despite being heavily marketed, *GAMP No Nazo* wasn't a big hit, so for the next *Xevious* game Namco went right back to basics. *Fardraut Saga*, while loaded with power-ups and new enemies and innovations, is basically classic *Xevious*, even taking place over much of the same terrain. (To give you a sneak preview, the original coin-op is included in the guise of "Recon" mode, as opposed to the main "Scramble" game.)

The most significant change is the provision of four different ships instead of just your standard Solvalou, which you can mix and match across your lives before the game starts, if for example you want to tackle early levels with the weaker fighters but give yourself more powerful craft later on. The trade-off is that while the new ships have more firepower, they increase the number of points required to gain an extra life, from the Solvalou's 50,000 up to a whopping 300,000 for the multi-firing, big-bombed Gampmission. You'll want all the offensive capabilities you can get your hands on at first, because this is a punishing and unforgiving game, but you'll inch a little further with every play and there's always something new to see.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The excellent BlueMSX emulator.



» Just before you encounter the new beefed-up Andor Genesis, you fly over a whole airstrip full of the old models upgraded.





» *Xevious* actually has its own alphabet and language, made up of angular characters and most extensively displayed in the *Fardraut* games. "Solvalou" translates roughly as "sun bird".

1990

XEVIOUS FARDRAUT DENSETSU (PC ENGINE)

Although as far as this reporter knows, "Densetsu" translates as "Saga", this isn't the same game as the MSX2 title. (The MSX game ends with the message "See you again next game – Episode 2 Final Weapon", so while it's not explicitly called such a thing it seems likely that the PCE game is actually that.)

If Saga is Xevious on steroids (pumped-up and much-augmented, but lumbering and sluggish), then Densetsu is Xevious after a serious amphetamine injection. Split into distinct levels with ever-larger static bases at the end of each one, Densetsu whips along at a much nippier pace, stripped of all extraneous fripperies. (Don't you just hate extraneous fripperies?) You get a different ship for each stage (you don't see the Solvalou until Level 3, which is lifted directly from a long section of the first Xevious), but there are no obvious differences between any of them, and power-ups are reduced to gradually incrementing the rate and width of your cannon fire.

It's an exhausting, exciting game made rather more welcoming by being able to restart from the beginning of any level you've reached, but still presents a daunting challenge.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The peerless PCE emu Magic Engine.

1991

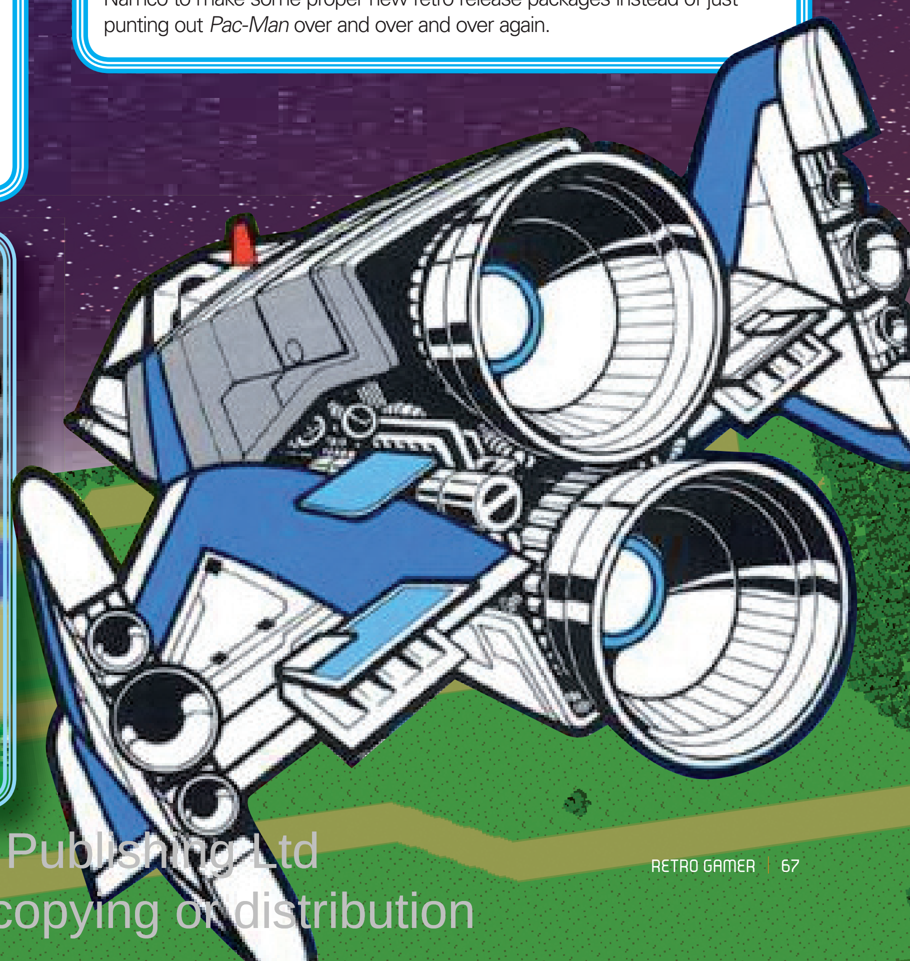
SOLVALOU (ARCADE)

Having crudely tacked a 3D on-rails polygon shooter onto the *Galaxian* line the previous year (see RG 32), Namco extended the policy to *Xevious* in 1991. This time at least the result was reasonably faithful to the series (trivia fact: the cabinet actually bears the word "Fardraut", though it isn't mentioned anywhere else), and played substantially like a first-person version of "proper" *Xevious*, but curiously (given the success of the very similar, but inferior, *Galaxian3* and *Star Blade*) it wasn't at all popular and very few machines ever made it into arcades. You'll be extremely lucky to see one in the wild nowadays, so get some coins into it pronto if you do. It'll probably be your only chance.

PLAY IT NOW ON: You can't, pretty much. One of the great "lost" coin-ops, *Solvalou* has never been ported to a home format, and runs very poorly and buggily in MAME, so if you missed it the first time you'll have to badger Namco to make some proper new retro release packages instead of just punting out *Pac-Man* over and over and over again.



» This is the first-stage base, which can be easily despatched with a couple of bombs to the pulsing centre. Later ones are a lot more staunchly fortified.







» The "farmland" sections of scenery are one of *Arrangement*'s few new features.

1995
XEVIOUS ARRANGEMENT (ARCADE)

As it did after *GAMP No Nazo*, Namco followed up a *Xevious* flop by reverting to the tried-and-tested formula, and in 1995 released the first "real" arcade sequel in the series. Part of a compilation called *Namco Classics Collection Vol.1* (which also featured *Galaga* and *Mappy*), *Arrangement* appeared alongside the original and "*Super*" versions of *Xevious*. (Slightly interestingly, the version of the 1982 *Xevious* found in this coin-op has been modified so that it can be completed instead of just looping until it crashes, but the latter sections are as savage as ever, so for most players it's a moot point.)

Deviating very little from the original blueprint (mildly enhanced graphics, almost no power-ups, a small handful of new enemies), *Arrangement* isn't very interesting or entertaining, save perhaps for the three insanely difficult Extra Areas which can be unlocked by performing tasks such as finishing the game without continues. It's particularly weak musically, lacking the famous hypnotic eight-note trance loop of its grandparent or any of the inventive variations of it found in the MSX and PC Engine games.

PLAY IT NOW ON: *Namco Classics Collection Vol.1* works well in MAME. *Arrangement* can also be found on *Xevious 3D/G* for the PlayStation (see next entry).

1996
XEVIOUS 3D/G (ARCADE, PSONE)

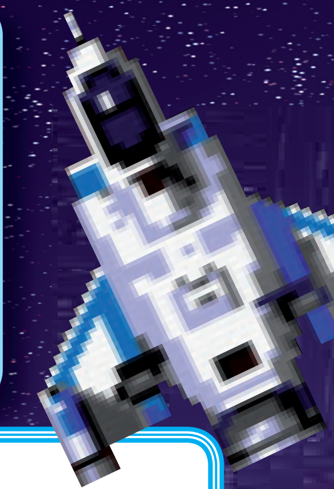
Perhaps in slight embarrassment, Namco only waited a year before rushing out another *Xevious* follow-up, and this time it made a much better job of it. Returning to 3D, but this time in the more traditional overhead view, *3D/G* is a rather lovely remake, fast and pretty and smooth and fresh, without ever straying too far from the classic formula. The main novelty is the choice of three weapon systems, changed or powered-up with crystals released by bombing ground targets, although they make little difference to strategy. With infinite continues on offer, lazy cheats can clear the seven rather short but varied levels in under half-an-hour (and view an end sequence which finally explains the significance of the Nazca lines), but the true challenge is of course to beat the game in a single credit, and that's a much more demanding discipline. (It's a shame nobody had yet thought of the incrementing-credits system used to such compelling effect in modern-day shmups like *Gradius V* and *Raiden 3*.)

With *Xevious*, *Super Xevious* and *Xevious Arrangement* all included in the PSone release (retitled *Xevious 3D/G+*), and some cute secret unlockables like the ability to turn your Solvalou into Paul or Heihachi from *Tekken* (which also has an effect on the end movie), *3D/G* is a very likeable little game, reminiscent in feel of the Mega CD's splendid *Silpheed*. The PSone played host to the heyday of the classic-remaker's art (Hasbro's update of *Pong*, for example, is one of the greatest games of the 32-bit era), and this is a fine example of the form.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your PSone/PS2, or the PlayStation emu ePSXe.



» Even a laser as powerful as this can't take out those implacable flat Bacura shields.





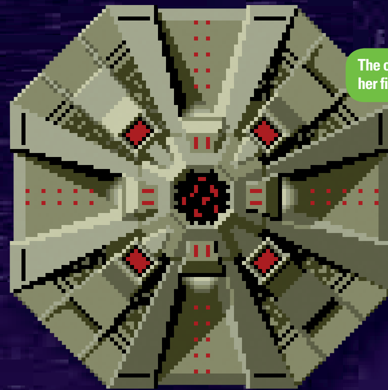
» The screen you'll see most often in Scramble Mission.

2006
XEVIOUS SCRAMBLE MISSION (TV GAME)

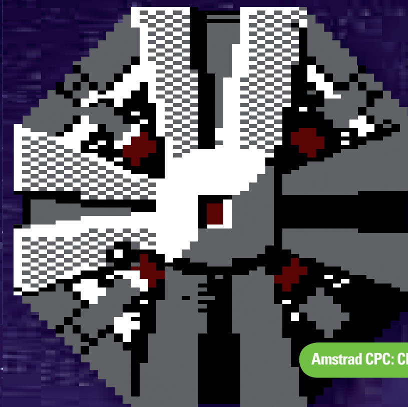
After such a flurry of activity in the early 1990s, *Xevious* sadly failed to make an appearance in gaming's subsequent generation, save for the usual Namco cameos, most notably in *Starfox Assault*. The first new *Xevious* game in a decade appeared neither in arcades nor on console but – as with *Gaplus Phalanx* from Issue 32's *Galaxian* feature – on a Japanese plug-in TV game. The matchbox-sized unit features (along with two *Mappy* games) the original *Xevious* and *Scramble Mission*: a time-attack game where your Solvalou speeds through little tunnel levels a bit like the inside-the-mothership ones in *GAMP No Nazo*, collecting "S" flags and avoiding ground and air attacks until you reach each level's mothership.

You start with 90 seconds on the clock, and lose just three seconds every time you get shot, but you'll need every spare moment you can get if you're going to blow up all the weak points on each increasingly-evasive mothership before the timer runs out. The tunnels get twistier and tougher as you move through the six levels, with moving barriers to negotiate and doors that have to be shot open with your Zapper. With the sort of care and attention that so often shames penny-pinching Western publishers, the unit saves scores and progress to its own memory, and with the six levels making for an addictive maximum game length of nine minutes (less than seven if you're good), there's always time for a quick shot at your high score.

PLAY IT NOW ON: You'll need a man in Japan if you want to try your hand at *Scramble Mission*. The units work fine on British TVs, but I don't know of anyone importing them commercially as yet – www.ncsx.com used to have them in its catalogue for $39, but don't seem to any more.



The original in all her fiery glory



Amstrad CPC: Clash Genesis

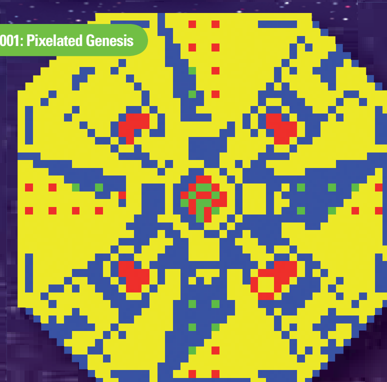
ANNWIDDECOMBE GENESIS, MORE LIKE

The Andor Genesis mothership was one of the first bosses in videogaming – certainly the first in a scrolling shmup – and occupies an honoured place in the hall of videogaming icons. Unfortunately, it's also had to suffer some tremendous indignities in the care of cack-handed conversion coders.

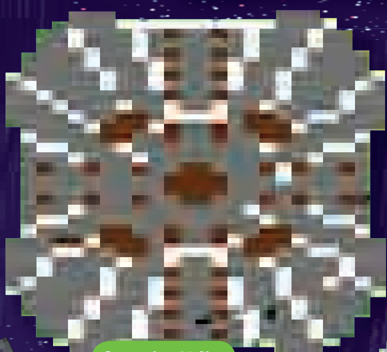


Atari 5200: Pavement Pizza Genesis

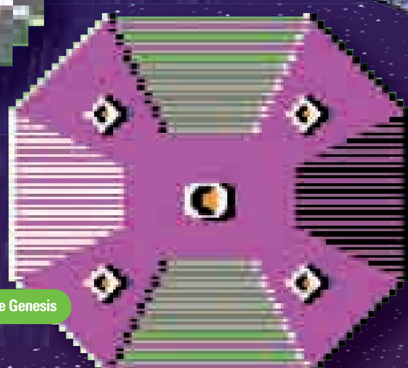




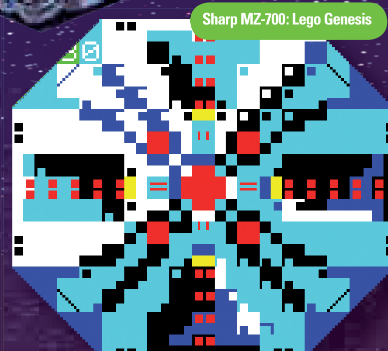
PC-6001: Pixelated Genesis



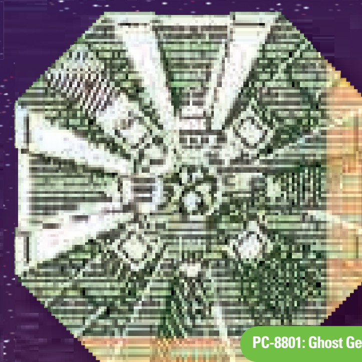
Commodore 64: Not Even Trying Genesis



Apple 2: Purple Genesis



Sharp MZ-700: Lego Genesis

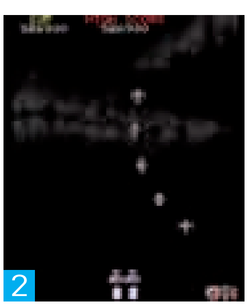


PC-8801: Ghost Genesis

HERE, THERE, ANYWHERE



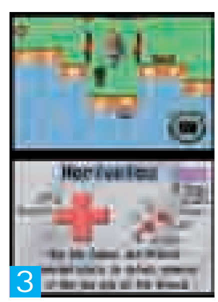
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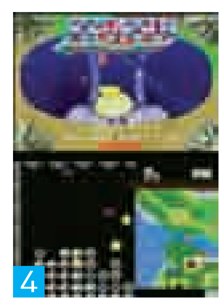
2

Attentive viewers will already know how Namco loves to slip the characters and icons from its "Golden Generation" games into other titles – *Xevious* itself has hosted guest appearances from *Rally-X* (the secret "S" flags that signify extra lives or points bonuses if you can find them), *Galaxian* (chromed-up flagships showing up in *Super Xevious*), *Pac-Man* (in *Tiny Xevious*) and *Dig Dug* (you can encounter a giant Pooka boss in *3D/G*). *Xevious* pops up in the unlikeliest of places, though. It's not much of a surprise to encounter it in arcade shmup mini-game collection *Tenkomori Shooting* (fig.1), and the *GAMP* baddies showing up in the That's Galactic Dancin' stage of the X68000's *Galaga 88 Arrangement* (fig. 2) isn't much of a leap either, but it's perhaps rather less expected as "Horivalou" in *Dig Dug Digging Strike* on the DS (fig.3). The weirdest, though, has to be the *Xevious* level somehow worked into Japanese DS *Tetris*-ish puzzler *Trion Cube* (fig.4).

It's not just Namco that likes to honour this most venerable of scrolling shooters, though. Back in 1990, legendary Amiga shmup *SWIV* was one of the first games to pinch *Xevious*' idea of having the whole gameworld as a single continuous level, and it recognised the debt with a lovely little tribute section early in the game (fig.5) featuring *Xevious*' distinctive landscape style populated by three of its trademark enemies (the Toroid fighter, Domogram ground tank and the famous Bacura spinning shields). It's a charming acknowledgement, and a lovely surprise the first time you see it. Unless, of course, some idiot's just spoiled it for you in a magazine.



3



4



5




PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Team Andromeda
Released: 1998
Featured Format: Sega Saturn
Expect to pay: £100+

FEW GAMES HAVE THE HONED AESTHETIC STYLING AND DIRECTION TO MATCH FINE PAINTINGS; FEW HAVE EXCLUSIVELY COMPOSED MUSIC THAT CAN RIVAL THE ANCIENT SYMPHONIC MASTERS; EVEN LESS HAVE QUALITY WRITING WHICH EXCEEDS PROPER LITERATURE. PANZER DRAGOON SAGA IS ONE OF THOSE FEW TITLES WHICH HAS ALL THREE – A RARE DIAMOND OF BRILLIANCE AMIDST MASS-PRODUCED GARBAGE. RETRO GAMER SIPS FINE WINE AND EXALTS THIS GENUINE EXAMPLE OF VIDEOGAME ART.

PANZERESE ROSETTA STONE

Highlighting just how detailed the *Panzer Dragoon* universe is, Yukio Futatsugi (a key designer whose hobby is foreign languages) created an entire new language specifically for it, affectionately referred to as Panzerese by fans. But this wasn't invented babble, it was a proper language spoken in the opening and ending scenes (in-game dialogue was Japanese), and occasionally mentioned in text. The Rosetta Stone was the Panzerese ending song "Sona mi areru ec sancitu", which had the lyrics listed phonetically and in Japanese. It's said to be based on a mixture of Ancient Greek, Latin (also based on Ancient Greek), German, and due to actor pronunciation, Japanese. Fans have attempted to compile dictionaries, working out grammar formation and word modifiers; for example "geskell" is "to kill", but adding "de" onto the beginning means "to not kill." The aforementioned song title, by the way, means "Art Thou the Holy One?"



The high quality of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* (hereafter *Saga*), as described in the opening, is without question. A far better question is why have so few played it? The first two games sold well, the first disc of *Saga* was given away free with the May 1998 issue of Sega Saturn Magazine, and the game received unanimous praise in international publications. Surely every Saturn owner wanted it? Unfortunately the Saturn was in decline, while the game itself had a limited English-language print run – different sources estimate it anywhere between 5 and 30 thousand. As a result, one of the greatest games of the late Nineties went unplayed by most, and only in later years has it developed a cult following. Prices vary but today, for a mint PAL version with perfect outer sleeve, you can expect to pay up to and sometimes above £100. Rare and expensive games are nothing new, but with *Saga* we can honestly say the price is justified by the playing experience; it's a

SAGA IS NOT ONLY AN INCREDIBLE CHRONICLE, BUT IT HAS A BOISTEROUSLY ORIGINAL SET OF UNDERLYING MECHANICS



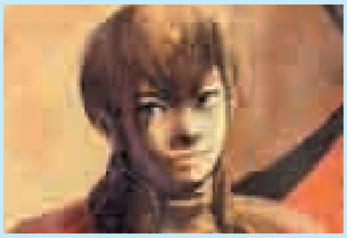
» The purple creature to the left is a Kinoshita Whale. They were thought to be extinct, but this creature helps you out.



» Throughout the games there are many mysterious ruins, such as this one jutting out of the Forest of Zoah.

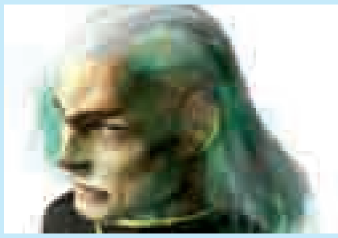
ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

And these are some of the players



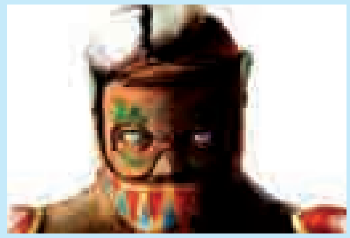
EDGE

The antihero, Edge, is a young hunter who sees his friends murdered and is then shot by Zastava. Killed at the start, he's only kept alive by the special bond with his dragon steed. Edge's goal at first is revenge, but he soon becomes the pawn of several rival groups.



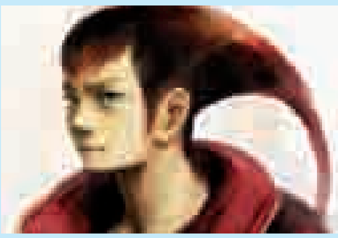
CRAYMEN

The trouble starter. He betrays the emperor and steals the drone Azel, in the process incurring Edge's wrath and obliterating the empire's capital city. Craymen's true motivations later become apparent, but he's not a stereotypical villain and is morally quite ambiguous.



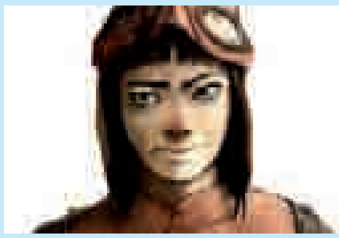
ZASTAVA

Inspired by *Mad Max 2* Zastava hides his disfigured face with a mask, flies a gyrocopter-styled gunship, and brandishes a sawn-off-shotgun. He's Craymen's right-hand man and the best pilot in the empire – but is he a psychotic bastard, or overzealous in fighting a good cause?



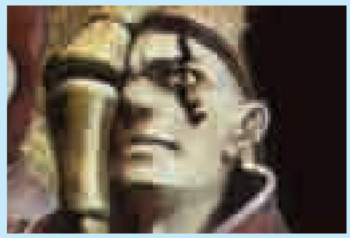
AZEL

The object of Craymen and the Emperor's desire, plus fiercely loyal to Craymen, Azel is a biological drone created by scientists of the ancient age. First a harbinger of catastrophe, then a formidable enemy, she ends up being a trusted ally who comes to love Edge.



PAET

Also inspired by the *Mad Max* films, Paet is a likeable roguish blend of the Gyrocaptain, Master and other gadget tinkerers. A philosopher on life, religion, and an expert on the ancient age, he fixes relics, including an aircraft, acting as an outlet to explain the past.



GASH

This mysterious figure is met early, when Edge saves his life, and is a true ally, but Skiad Ops Gash hides many secrets along with his masked face. He is a seeker, a group which studies the ancient age and opposes the empire, and later plays a pivotal role.

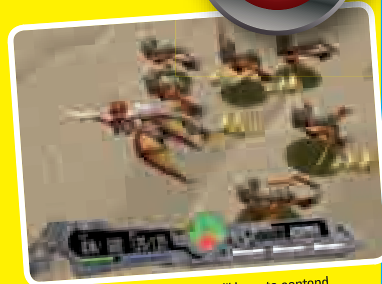
game worth striving to find, and saving every penny to play at least once.

Sega's personal account of *Saga*'s history reveals some interesting facts. Development of it actually started alongside *Zwei*, despite being released a full two years after. This would explain why *Zwei* can recognise *Saga*'s save data. Sega also had to double the size of the original team to 40. But like so many bittersweet pieces of artistic media, it was plagued by problems – like the death of a team-member. Things were so problematic the entire group went to a Japanese shrine for "purification", in order to allay their bad luck. Fate must have smiled, because Team Andromeda went on to create one of the greatest games the world has known.

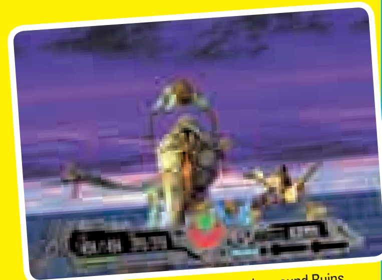
Saga eschewed the all-out blasting of previous games, shrewdly taking an RPG approach to better facilitate the amazing narrative and universe which had been created. It's curious that despite the rich and painstakingly detailed nature of the *Panzer* series, only one of an estimated six different titles (not counting the PC or PS2 versions of the original) took a direction which allowed for a detailed examination of everything. It was a series which lent itself best to the RPG genre and, while *Orta* was excellent, *Saga* can still be regarded as the pinnacle.

It was and still is like no other RPG that exists, which increases its desirability. From the outset the player is granted the freedom to fly anywhere within the great Panzerian world. Soon the main character, Edge, is gliding across the Garil Desert ruins, watching as giant sandworms arch across the delicate skyline. It feels surreally reminiscent of the Frank Herbert/David Lynch classic, *Dune*. Indeed the entire series draws inspiration from many other examples of popular media (see Threads Of Influence).

The storyline, despite borrowing from others, is mostly devoid of clichés and is the highlight of *Saga*. It's set in a ruined future dystopia, after a great catastrophe which brought about the end of the ancient age and caused biological horrors to be released into the world. Mankind forever lies on the brink of extinction, only able to defend itself by relying on excavated weapon relics from



» When traversing the desert you'll have to contend with Stryder herds, such as this one. The battles are easy, but quite breathtaking.



» After escaping from the labyrinth underground Ruins of Uru, you have to contend with this formidable boss. Notice the beautiful sunset. Amazing.



» Edge's campsites are a place to chat with companions, rest up, and get to know your dragon better.



» This Caravan is home to a group of nomadic monster hunters. During your quest they will aid you a great deal, and you them.

EUPHEMISTICALLY RIDE THE DRAGON



NEUTRAL

The Base dragon is a completely neutral transformation with even stat boosting.



ATTACK

This form has very powerful homing lasers, but at the cost of Spiritual attacks.



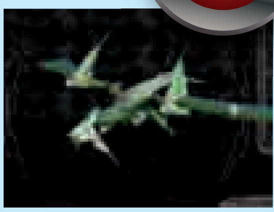
DEFENCE

This stubby armoured creature can take a lot of damage, but is damned slow.



AGILITY

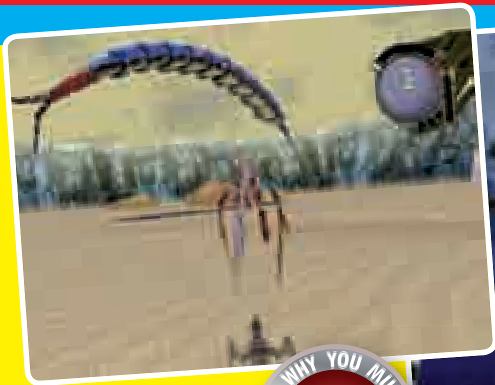
This transformation causes faster charging bars, but gets hurt more easily.



SPIRITUAL

You can perform powerful Spirit attacks, but homing lasers are almost useless.

WHY YOU MUST PLAY!





» This is the forbidden zone and in the centre is the ancient Sky Transporter, previously hidden within a vortex. You should recognise it from *Zwei*.

BIOLOGICAL HORRORS AND THE IMPERIAL THREAT

The world of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is inhabited by organic terrors and terrifying mechanical abominations. The variety of enemies is truly astounding. Here are just six of those you must face.



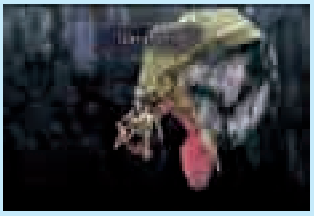
ATOLM

Atolm is a pure-type monster, the dragon Azel rides on, and is described as the "Guardian of the ancient age." It's appearance is said to strike terror into even toughened warriors. As the game progresses it becomes more powerful.



GUARDIAN DRAGON

This was previously a boss in *Zwei*, and the enemy encyclopedia says "a ghost of the past. This ancient horror has risen again to serve the towers." In *Saga* its resurrected form is fairly easy to defeat, but there's a great rush of nostalgia.



ARACHNOTH

The first proper boss you face, the Arachnoth is chasing after Skiad Ops Gash. Said to be the most dangerous creature in the valleys, it's heavily armoured, easily angered, and attacks with digestive slime. Though formidable, its incredible stupidity is its undoing.



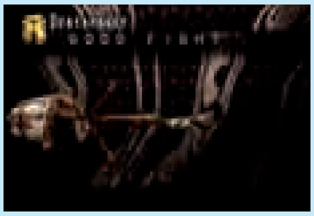
LATHUM

This grotesque monstrosity is found in the desert, and is described as "an enormous mountain of slime and steam." The Lathum is a mutated non-pure monster-type, which hides beneath the desert dunes and feeds on unsuspecting sandworms. Don't let its massive size intimidate you.



GRIG ORIG

The name of this giant floating fortress mean IRON FIST in Panzerese, which is rather apt. As the Emperor's Flagship, it's equipped with anti-air batteries and can destroy entire villages with a single blast. Later on it becomes infested with monsters, running rampant.



DEATHMAKER

The Deathmaker is a surface-to-air missile capable of levelling entire regions – similar to a nuclear weapon. Its first form is hurtling along on a rail track, while the next form is the missile. There's a tight time limit, but you need to destroy it in order to save Zoah.

the forgotten past. You control Edge, a young hunter hired by The Empire to guard a special excavation site. Eventually they stumble across the object of the empire's desire: a biomechanical woman, or drone, in suspended animation, called Azel. Suddenly a rogue member of the empire, Craymen, attacks the site in his aerial gunships, kills Edge's adoptive father, and then leaves him for dead. From here, having fallen into a ravine, Edge makes contact with a dragon from the ancient age and embarks on a quest for bloody revenge against Craymen. But the storyline twists, with good and evil being both ambiguous and interchangeable. The conclusion is chilling, and a real mind warp. What makes everything unique is how cohesive and well realised this world is – unlike other fantasy games, there's a strong sense of believability to the portrayed events. *Saga* on several levels is a blend of disparate elements, things which are seldom found together. While there are other games, also RPGs, which it could be argued tell an equally as interesting story, many are mired in archaic designs and contrived gameplay. *Saga* is not only an incredible chronicle, but it has a boisterously original set of underlying mechanics. Unlike other RPGs there is no walking, with the exception of the few towns you visit. The majority of the game is played whilst astride your dragon, alternating between flying underground in caverns and tunnels, and above ground over valleys and expansive wastes.

The scarce occasions when you are actually on foot, *Saga* takes on an almost point-and-click style of gameplay. Unlike its contemporaries there is no need to walk directly up to something in order to examine it. It's possible to move a cursor around each area, automatically highlighting points of interest which can be clicked on. By making it apparent what needs investigating the game is far more streamlined, saving valuable time and allowing one to enjoy the surroundings to the maximum potential without getting bored.

THE STORYLINE TWISTS, WITH GOOD AND EVIL BEING BOTH AMBIGUOUS AND INTERCHANGEABLE. THE CONCLUSION IS CHILLING, AND A REAL MIND WARP

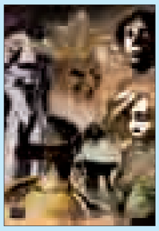


THREADS OF INFLUENCE

The *Panzer Dragoon* series has been influenced by many other great works.

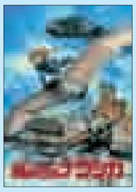
LES MONDES ENGLOUTIS

The least discussed influence, this French animated series was known as *Spartakus* and *The Sun Beneath The Sea*. Two everyday children journey underground to the lost city of Arkadia, once saved from an ancient cataclysm but now dying, while travelling in a living vessel called Tehrig.



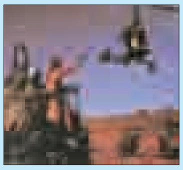
NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND

Nausicaä is one of Hayao Miyazaki's most beautiful works and the manga, which took 12 years to realise, is the most important influence on Sega's series. It's set in a post-apocalyptic world, and has identical themes of extinction, purification, tortured pasts, aerial gunships, flying, plus massive mutated creatures.



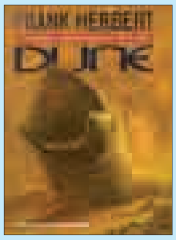
MAD MAX

Key series artist Takashi Iwade has already admitted in interviews the strong influence the *Mad Max* films had. The Gyrocaptain and Humungous from the second film, along with Master Blaster from the third, are all paralleled in *Saga*. Meanwhile Bartertown has similarities to Zoah's Holy District. There's also the same post-apocalyptic desert premise.



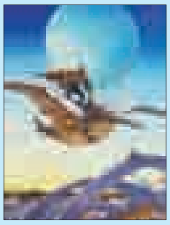
DUNE

This is another creation (books and film-adaptation by Frank Herbert and David Lynch) which Iwade claimed had an influence. Beyond the desert landscapes and sandworm creatures, which are directly copied, *Saga* examines the same themes of tyrannical empires and hostile eco-systems.



MOEBIUS

French comic artist Jean Giraud (Moebius), is credited in the first *Panzer* game for the Japanese box art. Both Iwade and Kentaro Yoshida say the entire team were huge *Moebius* fans. He also created the renowned French comic series Arzach, about a warrior who rides a stone bird through a surreal landscape.



The battle system is also different, blending real-time movement with turn-based attacks similar to Square's *FFVII*, though *Saga*'s system is far more exciting. The dragon can at any time move to one of four compass positions, allowing attacks against weak-points. Meanwhile three bars charge up, with different attacks requiring a different number of bars (homing lasers, concentrated gun attack, berserk techniques, and so on). In this genre games live or die by their overworld exploration and battle-systems – something overly generic or hackneyed is likely to result in boredom. In this respect *Saga* is unique. Even today, thanks to its sheer inventiveness, it is still supremely enjoyable. The single thing which shows its age is the slightly limited draw distance during flight, and the town sections.

But even so, thanks to clever and imaginative art direction the visuals still retain a strong degree of charm. While there is some pop-up, and while the models have low polygon counts, the sunken ruins of Uru at sunset or a ragtag fleet of aerial gunships cruising the sky are truly astounding things. If anything, it could be argued the lower-resolution textures of *Saga* are in fact far more apt for the post-apocalyptic setting than the silky-sheen textures seen in *Orta*. For certain things, the grungier grainy look enhances the atmosphere, and better conveys the feeling that this world has suffered a great cataclysm.

Music quality meanwhile, in the case of CD-based games, never ages from a technical standpoint. If the original composition was excellent, then many years on it should still impress. Saga's soundtrack was both symphonic and eclectic, avoiding more conventional instruments in favour of things sounding like tribal drumbeats and unusual wind instruments. Although it consistently changed, the haunting and rousing music suited the eerie ruins being explored, greatly enhancing the atmosphere.

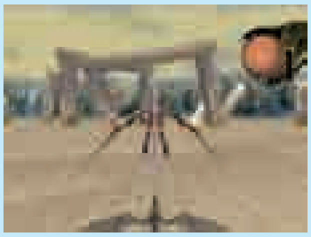
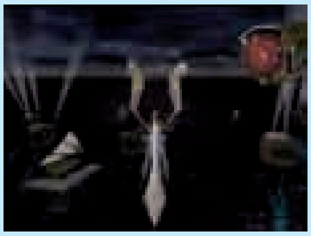
Panzer Dragoon Saga can be completed in just under 20 hours, but every minute of that journey is filled with such awe-inducing imagery, you regret finishing it. Despite age and high prices it's a timeless game. The real question is, why won't Sega re-release it?



PARADISE LOST

Along with the melancholy story, it is the chillingly bleak wastelands which make *Saga* such a captivating game. Desolate landscapes have always had an allure for mankind and combined with the sorrowful music of Saori Kobayashi and Mariko Nanba, those in *Saga* are particularly stirring. The flooded ruins of Uru show decayed structures towering above water, while beneath Uru are long forgotten tunnels once used by ancient scientists. The Garil Desert meanwhile contains wreckages of ancient warships and stone arches jutting from the sand, while enormous Sandworms plunge through the air. Every location holds a sense of mystery and makes you yearn for the chance to explore further.



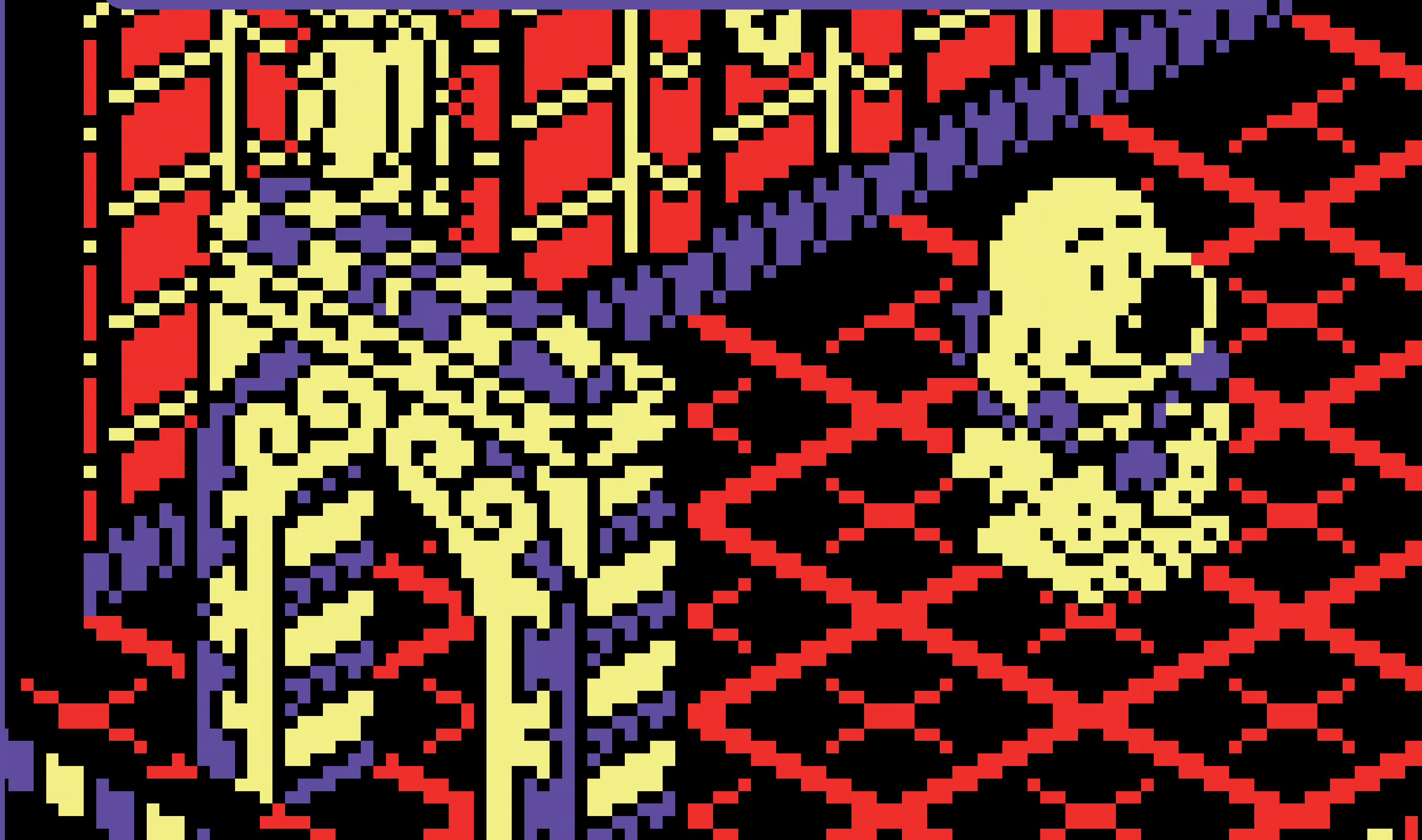


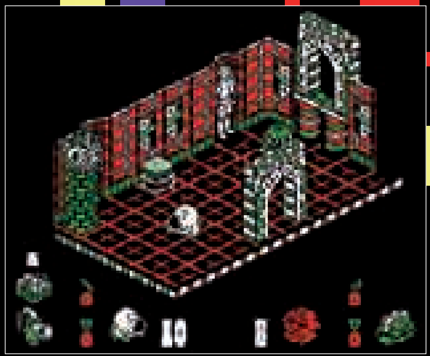
Many special thanks to Lance Way for providing emulated screenshots, plus also www.panzerdragoon.net and www.moonapples.com/lagi/ for assistance.

THE MAKING OF…

HEAD OVER HEELS

What do Batman, a healthy dose of bullshit, bizarre imagery and a strange partnership have in common? No, they're not all in Joel Schumacher's cinematic disaster Batman & Robin – they're major ingredients of Jon Ritman's 8-bit masterpiece Head Over Heels.

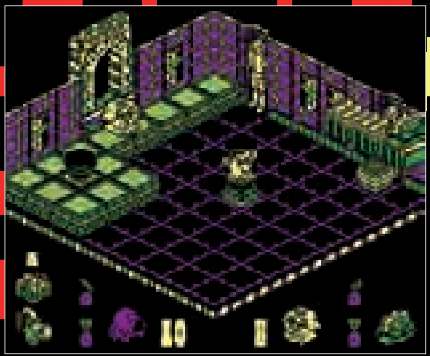




» There's something really fishy about this game! Heh heh heh! (I'm here all week…)



» The sandwiches on Egyptus are so stale that they're only fit for building handy staircases out of.



» "Getting that bit-part in *Doctor Who* was a mistake," mused Prince Charles, while Heels prepared to control him via a giant joystick.





» Arriving in a room of hostiles, Heels left a small puddle on the teleporter, before realising the enemies were inactive.



» Head practiced his tightrope-walking act, dreaming that one day he might be able to leave the spy game behind.

Delve into videogaming history and you'll be met with a plethora of strange-looking characters, along with a healthy population of anthropomorphic animals, out to right wrongs or to steal Sinclair C5s. The characters in Jon Ritman's timeless classic *Head Over Heels* are a rather unsettling combination of the two (Head is big-nosed noggin that has spindly arms with bat-like wings attached, and Heels resembles a dog, minus two feet, a tail and a torso), and yet their unique look fits in with their utterly surreal surroundings. And when combined with the game's then-epic scale and plentiful (and often infuriating) puzzles, *Head Over Heels* was ensured a permanent position in the top-list of any aficionado of 8-bit gaming.

For the uninitiated, *Head Over Heels* is an isometric arcade adventure, where the player guides the stars of the show – who both happen to be spies – around various locations, solving puzzles. The game's surreal plot (which can be sourced at World of Spectrum – www.worldofspectrum.org – and which Jon admits was "bullshit I wrote on the last day" to tie together the game's disparate elements and help the user make sense of the eclectic array of characters and imagery) centres on the evil Blacktooth Empire and a quartet of enslaved planets. The game begins with Head and Heels banged up in adjoining cells, with two aims in mind: 'liberating' crowns from the clutches of the evil Blacktooth Empire, and escaping to Freedom, their home planet. Luckily, Blacktooth prisons appear to be progressive, and teleporters are found near the two creatures' starting locations, so they can begin their quest.

When *Head Over Heels* was released, back in 1987, almost every publication from Sinclair User to Zzap!64 was full of praise. But *Head Over Heels* always felt more at home on the Spectrum and Amstrad – the C64 was lumbered, by

"BATMAN AND HEAD OVER HEELS WERE BASICALLY UNPLANNED; I MADE THEM UP AS I WENT ALONG, AND JUST KEPT ADDING STUFF UNTIL THE SPECTRUM WAS FULL" JON RITMAN

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

The symbiotic partnership enjoyed by Head and Heels is central to the game, and you won't progress far without managing to get the pair together. As if the potential for a major power-up wasn't enough to enthuse players (when Head and Heels are joined, the pair enjoy both the speed of Heels and Head's jumping power), Jon added further elements to urge players onwards. If Head wanders through the door from his start point, he'll see Heels in the adjoining cell, separated from him by an impassable barrier. And shortly afterwards, the pair cross paths, Heels in a tunnel and Head on top of it. "The tunnel was inspired by a section in Ultimate's *Alien 8*, where you come out on a balcony, able to see a room that you can't get down to," explains Jon, adding that he "liked the 'tease' element to it," and therefore used the same device to torment players in his own game!



IN THE KNOW

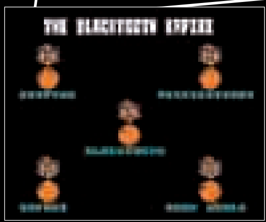


» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** JON RITMAN (WITH BERNIE DRUMMOND)
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

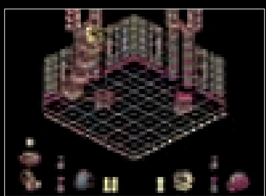




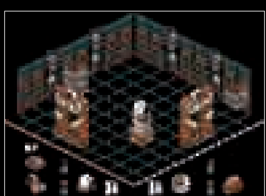
THE MAKING OF... HEAD OVER HEELS



» If this is to scale, it's going to be a bugger to lug those crowns back to Freedom.



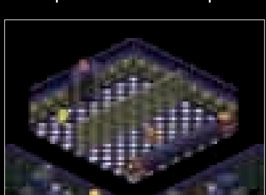
» After creating a makeshift staircase to reach the door, Heels decided that, yes, the architect of this place was a total idiot.



» All aboard the sarnie express! Next stop: that freaky-looking door.

THE REMAKING OF A CLASSIC

Despite the popularity of *Head Over Heels*, few remakes of the game have surfaced, largely due to its complexity. However, a few years back, Tomaz Kac took up the challenge (apparently because of a "hastily scrawled diagram posted on the Retrospec mailing list about how you can't properly sort isometric games without complex masking," according to co-conspirator and graphic artist Graham Goring), resulting in a faithful update, but with wildly improved graphics and lighting effects that put the original 16-bit conversions to shame. "I've seen the remake, and it's pretty good," says Jon, although he grumbles that "they handled the walls and doors differently, which has damaged the gameplay". Minor problems aside, the remake is impressive, and, for once, it's not only PC users that can join the party – via the game's microsite at http://retrospec.sgn.net/games/hoh/, those who favour Mac, Linux and BeOS can download ports for their computers.



comparison, with a sluggish conversion. Unsurprisingly Jon is an unashamed fan of Sinclair machines (and, by association, Amstrad's output), and his first experience with programming was with one of Sir Clive's earliest models. "I was working as a TV engineer for Radio Rentals when they started talking about renting out computers. It occurred to me they would need engineers that knew their way around them, and so I bought myself a Sinclair ZX81." Within a day, Jon was hooked, and every evening was spent ploughing through manuals and learning Basic. A week later, Jon was immersed in machine language, writing his own hex editor, and realising that he needed to come up with a project to work on: "All I could think of was a game, and within a month I sent my first effort to publishers; a day later, I got a call from Artic Computing, who said they'd buy it".

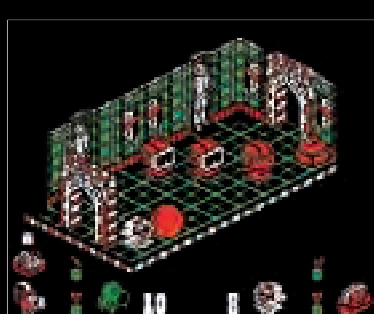
Initially, platform preference was largely irrelevant, and the ZX81 won out over Commodore's early output purely on price, but as Jon progressed to the Spectrum, he felt vindicated in his decision to buy British: "I always preferred the Spectrum to Commodore's range, because of the freedom it allowed me when being creative – Commodore's hardware pushed games designers towards sprite-based scrolling games." With 48 KB to play with, Jon crafted increasingly complex projects, including the Spectrum's answer to Commodore's *International Soccer*, the renowned *Match Day*; but it was his next game that really struck a chord, while also forming the basis for *Head Over Heels*. "When I delivered the *Match Day* master to Ocean, I was given a copy of the then-unreleased *Knight Lore*. When I saw it, my jaw dropped – it was just what I'd always wanted: a Disney film you could control," recalls Jon, who says he then set about figuring out how to achieve the masking process used for the display, and ended up bettering *Knight Lore*'s effort.

The game that used Jon's new system – *Batman* – would influence his follow-up. "For the gameplay, I decided what abilities Batman would have and then took them away," says Jon. "I created objects that would give him those abilities – jumping, carrying, gliding – with the idea that you started with nothing and would have to earn each ability. This worked well, and so when working on *Head Over Heels*, I did the same thing." Those who've played both games will notice other similarities, such as temporary extra powers and the 'resurrection' system, but *Head Over Heels* has one marked difference to Ritman's first adventure: the symbiotic relationship between its lead characters. When Head and Heels meet up, Head can plonk himself on top of Heels, and the combined freakshow creature inherits both of their capabilities. Alternatively, each character can wander off on their own, providing players with possibilities if they get stuck on one of the game's many puzzles. "I have been praised for the symbiotic relationship over the years, with many considering it genius, but at the time all I thought was that two characters, each having their own abilities, would enlarge the number of puzzles I could come up with," explains Jon.

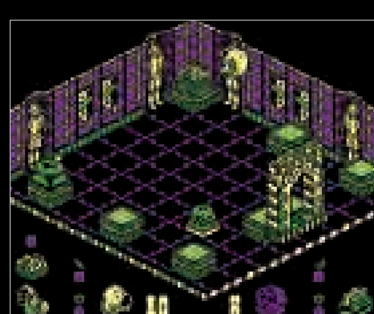
It's not that Jon's not proud of his game – far from it. It's just that he doesn't appear to want to take credit for things that 'just happened', or where a quick, simple idea worked perfectly. For fans of such a renowned retro game as *Head Over Heels*, and one that has so many disparate elements that work so well together, it's surprising to hear that there was no grand plan. "Both Batman and *Head Over Heels* were basically unplanned – I made them up as I went along, and just kept adding stuff until the Spectrum was full," explains Jon. "Once I had the basic engine, I would sit down to create some rooms, and come up with ideas." For each planet in *Head Over Heels*, maps were designed to take advantage of the two-character dynamic, with sections built where the two spies' paths would cross; further elements were then added that forced them to split and meet elsewhere. "I would then add the puzzles, making up each in turn, with no pre-planning at all," says Jon. "If I didn't have existing code to handle it, I would program it in and then ring up Bernie to ask for appropriate graphics."

Ah, yes: the graphics. Although *Batman* was a good-looking game, *Head Over Heels* betters it and then some. The graphics are quirky and eclectic, with a strong sense of individuality and character. Jon is keen to credit partner-in-crime Bernie Drummond for that aspect of the game. "Bernie has a wild imagination, and seeing as how the entire game was like a bizarre fantasy, I just gave him free rein to make things," explains Jon, when we ask how the designs for the various on-screen objects came to be. "I would just tell him the size I wanted and roughly what I was going to do with it, and he would then give me a bunch of graphics to choose from. I made a point of never worrying about differences in scale, but just chose the best looking stuff." This resulted in legions of Daleks with the heads of monkeys, elephants and even Prince Charles, vicious jet-pack-clad rat-like robots, and hostile, squat droids that look rather like bollards. As if that

> "OFTEN, I WOULD HAVE A LOAD OF BERNIE'S GRAPHICS THAT WERE JUST WAITING FOR A USE, AND SO WHEN I NEEDED A 'SAVE GAME' FEATURE, I SAW THE LOVELY FISH AND MADE UP SOME BULLSHIT IN THE PLOT TO EXPLAIN IT" JON RITMAN



» "Ten-pin bowling sure has changed since my day," thought Heels as he rolled the crystal ball towards the switch.



» Head leaps towards a tray of doughnuts, claiming his rotundness is down to being 'big-boned'.



» Once our heroes steal the Emperor's crown, they'll be declared Emperor in his place!



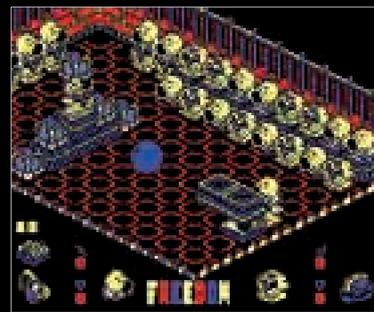


» Heels contemplates going to freedom alone after Head makes one too many jokes about being 'dog tired'.

motley collection wasn't surreal enough, other items ended up having rather more bizarre uses, including huge sandwiches that are used as moving platforms for accessing otherwise inaccessible areas of a room, and the aforementioned giant fish, used as a resurrection device, providing players with a 'second chance' of sorts when all lives are lost. "Often, I would have a load of Bernie's graphics that were just waiting for a use, and so when I needed a 'save game' feature, I saw the lovely fish and made up some bullshit in the plot to explain it," says Jon.

In the universe of *Head Over Heels*, even the more 'normal' items can work in a way other than how you'd expect. For example, early on, Heels can grab a bag, enabling him to pick up objects. However, the bag has a hole in it, which means items are lost if Heels moves to a new room. "This was a method of keeping puzzles in a single room," explains Jon. "I decided on this tactic after playing a game where, like in *Head Over Heels*, you had a certain freedom regarding where you went. This game would have an item in one room that you needed in another, but often you might come across the item long before you saw the puzzle, having no idea what it was for. You'd leave it behind and by the time you found the puzzle, you'd forgotten the item ever existed." And so for all of the lack of planning when creating *Head Over Heels*, it's clear there was plenty of fine-tuning, in order to produce the most optimal experience. "I used to have a development kit in my living room. Needless to say, friends would come round and want a quick go on the game; I would watch carefully, and anything that proved a major problem would be noted and changed," remembers Jon. "For example, I initially put physical and mental puzzles in the same room, but by watching others play, I spotted that they'd often suss what they needed to do – the mental part – but after failing physically a couple of times, they'd assume they were wrong and would therefore try something else. I realised I needed to separate the two puzzle types."

Luckily for Jon, he was able to concentrate on these important details, because he reckons that despite all of the game's complexity, puzzles and graphics, *Head Over Heels* wasn't a technical challenge: "Once I'd sussed the method, it was pretty damn easy and conversions to other Z80 machines, such as the Amstrads, was simplicity itself". The 6502 and 68000 conversions, however, were programmed by others, although via a line-by-line translation that meant they even ended up with the same bugs. "The only major change for the 6502 version was to amend a couple of rooms that had particularly high item counts that strained the resources of the C64's weedy processor," says Jon. The only bleak coding moment Jon admits to was "putting off the scary bit of converting the *Batman* engine to handle the two characters". In the end, there was nothing left to do, and so he had to bite the bullet and get on with it. "Amazingly, it only took two hours," he says. "I was so relieved!"



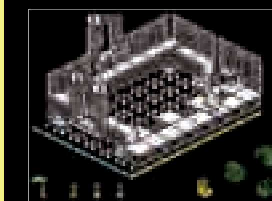
» Head and Heels get their reward for liberating all five planets: infinite crystal balls, fired at them from a huge gun.

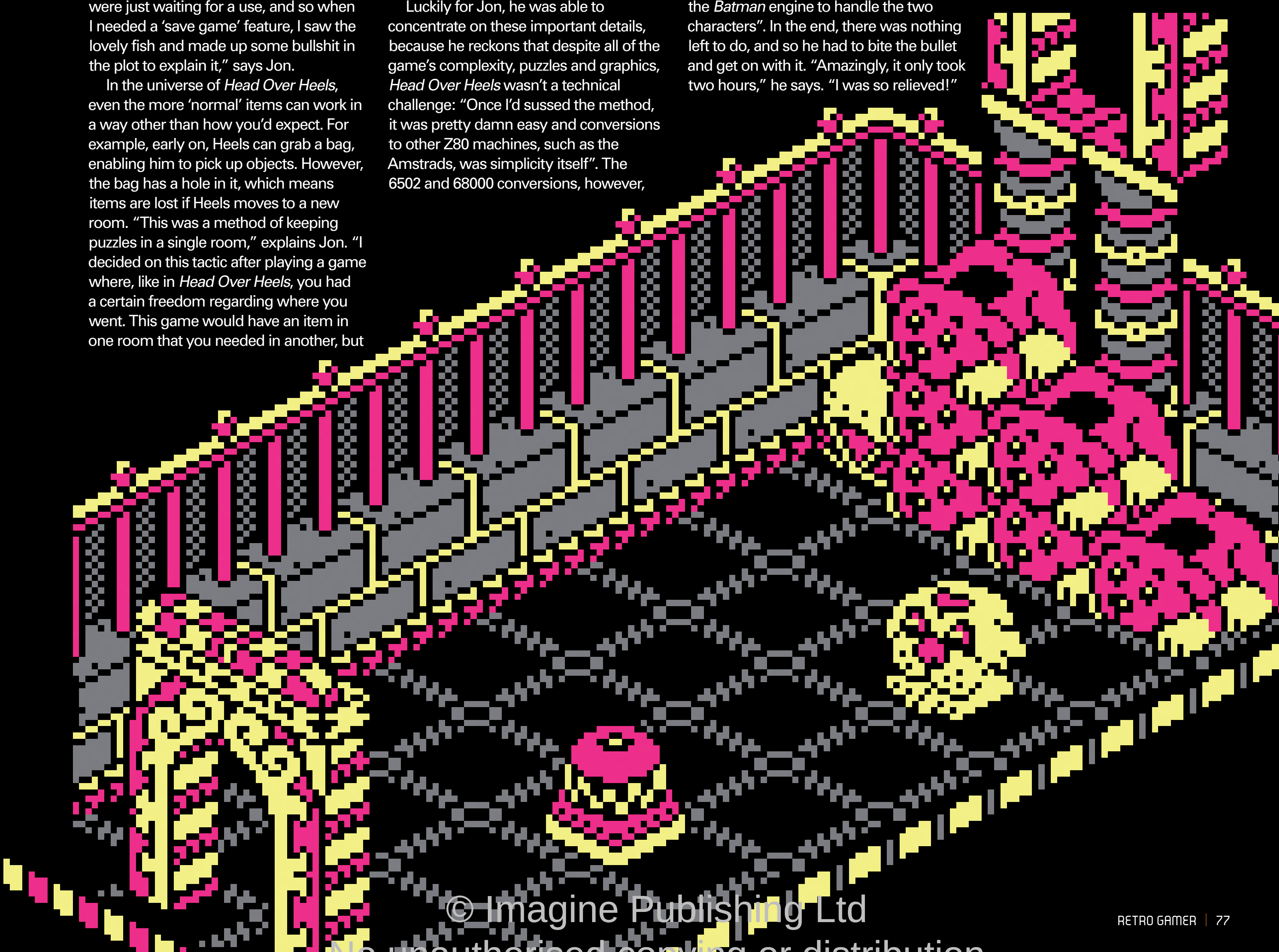
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MATCH DAY
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

BATMAN
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986

MONSTER MAX
SYSTEMS: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1994





DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



DATAFILE

NAME: STUART FOTHERINGHAM

DATE OF BIRTH: 8.2.1968

FIRST JOB: WORKING IN JUTEA, A COMPUTER SHOP IN ASHFORD

CURRENTLY: MANAGING DIRECTOR

FAVOURITE FILM: BLADE RUNNER



» A fresh-faced Stuart beginning at Software Projects and Stuart a few years later. The Sisters of Mercy have a lot to answer for.

STUART FOTHERINGHAM

AT 16, HE HEADED NORTH TO LIVERPOOL WHERE HE'D HEARD THE STREETS WERE MAPPED IN PIXELS. HE SPENT THE EIGHTIES THERE, WORKING ON THE MEGA-TREE AND BRINGING HIS ARTISTIC TALENTS TO BEAR AT SOFTWARE PROJECTS, ODIN AND DENTON DESIGNS. STUART FOTHERINGHAM TELLS PAUL DRURY ABOUT GRAPHICS, GOTHS AND GANGSTAS.

I can tell Stuart likes games. He might be the managing director of his own successful management consultancy firm, but he's cancelled his personal trainer so he can eulogise about Christmas 1978. "That's when I got an Atari VCS. Still the best present I've ever received. It doesn't really get any better," he said. That Atari obsession continued when a friend acquired an Atari 400 at the end of the Seventies, and soon his homework was replaced with scribbling down programs in BASIC and colouring in sprites on graph paper. Things escalated when he saw an American Commodore 64 at a PCW show. He pre-ordered one of the first to arrive on English shores and set about creating his own 'Hot or Not' database of the local girls' school and producing primitive porn through inspired use of ASCII characters. We had to use our imagination in them days.

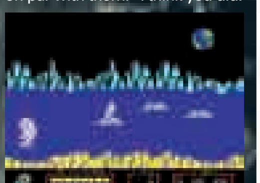
"I got into loads of trouble for that," admits Stuart, sheepishly. "My parents were getting concerned because I'd stopped working at school. They went to see the headmaster and he told them to throw the computer away – there was no future in them." The Fotheringhams collectively ignored this sage advice and young Stuart got busy learning assembly code instead. The precocious 16-year-old, who'd read about the exploits of Matthew Smith, Eugene Evans and the thriving Liverpool coding scene, then wrote to development companies including Imagine, Quicksilva, and Software Projects offering his services, and the latter replied. "They asked me if I was interested in relocating; I had to ask my mum what that meant."

So the intrepid southern boy headed north and met with Software Projects' management team. Suitably impressed with a demo he presented that circumvented their 'unbreakable' copy protection, they set him to work on the prestigious conversion of

YOU MUST PLAY...

Nodes Of Yesod

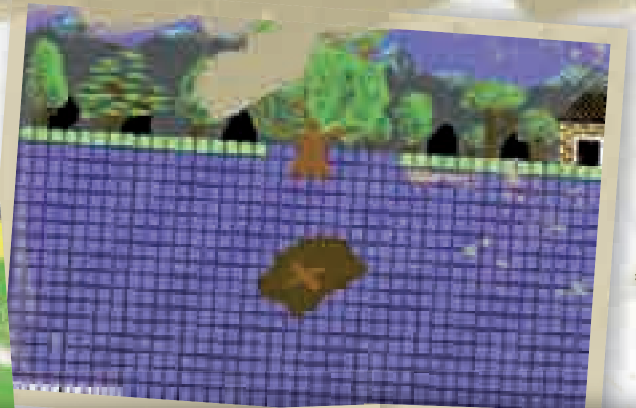
Nodes is a prime example of a game that is more than the sum of its parts. While it clearly draws from *Underwurlde*, and the speech and somersaulting owe a debt to *Impossible Mission*, the detailed characters, expansive map and intriguing use of moles give this a charm all of its own. It's a considerable challenge – Stuart admits they made it too hard, only completing it once themselves – and so few have seen the monolith that rewards the victor. "The inspiration for *Nodes* was, ultimately, Ultimate," Stuart acknowledges. "We wanted to do something that was on par with them." I think you did.



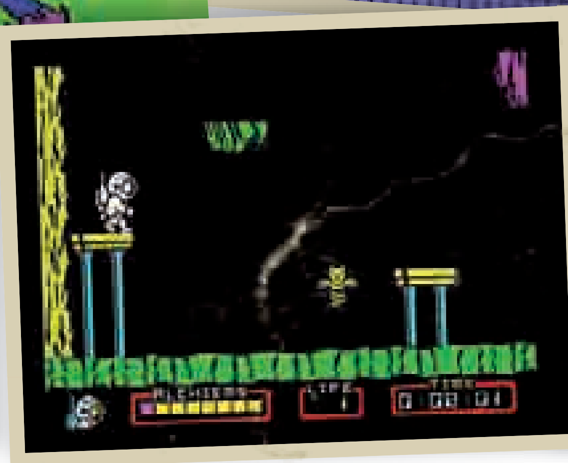
Sing-a-long now, 'Catch a mole, find a hole…'

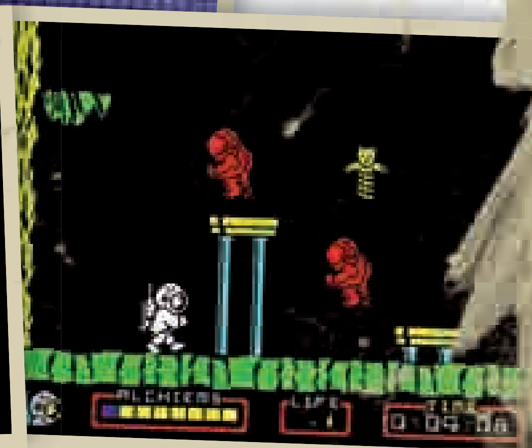






» **Left:** Sketches for the Mega-Tree project are intriguing, but the single screen demo wasn't enough to stop management calling time.





» **Top:** One of Stuart's first loading screens for Software Projects. **Bottom:** The Holt Rd boys – fishnet stockings just out of shot.

» **Above:** *Nodes Of Yesod*: A hippy title, coded by Goths, featuring an upper class former Noddy. What's not to like?

Jet Set Willy for the Commodore 64. But he wasn't alone.

"Turns out they'd hired two or three freelancers to do the same job and whoever finished first would get paid – and I was the contingency plan! In the meantime though, we'd received a load of Koala pads for the Commodore 64 and I convinced the boss, Alan Maton, I should do loading screens for all their Commodore 64 games. So within weeks, I'd gone from a programmer to a graphic artist."

"HOLT ROAD BECAME THIS MESS OF COMPUTERS – APPLE IIS, C64S, SPECCYS, ATARIS, VIDEO PLAYERS, 'EXOTIC' FILMS, STACKS OF SOFTWARE FOR 'INSPIRATION'. IT WAS A GEEK'S DREAM"

STUART ON THE MEGA-TREE 'DEVELOPMENT STUDIO'

Stuart had his niche, which came in handy when the staff at SP were bolstered by an influx of newly redundant coders from Imagine, which had imploded in a blaze of repossessed Ferraris. He also had his social niche, and between knocking up screens for *Hunchback At The Olympics* and the like, he would hang around with Matt Smith, Steve Weatherill and Marc Dawson (now Wilding), who had recently done such a good job on converting *JSW* for the Amstrad, it was ported back to the Spectrum and released as *JSW 2*.

These 'young guns' may have been supremely talented, but their exploits away from the keyboard were giving management cause for concern. After one particularly destructive incident, which concluded with Matt trying to traverse the suspended ceiling in the SP offices in search of a lost wallet, only to crash through the roof and end up sleeping in the resultant pile of broken monitors, the happy band of Stuart, Matt and Marc were moved out to a semi in Holt Road, Birkenhead.

"It was a fair distance from the offices in Walton," recalls Stuart. "We ended up living there and the front room became our development studio. We had our Apple IIs, Matt had his trusty TRS-80, and there was this mess of computers – C64s, Speccys, Ataris, video players, 'exotic' films, stacks of software for 'inspiration' – a geek's dream."

Stuart romantically describes the ensuing three months as, "a period of R&D", as the trio drank, smoked, went clubbing and made copious notes for their epic Mega-Tree project. Inspired by a rotating tower idea, later seen in Nebulous, the central mechanism for getting around the gameworld was to be a gigantic spinning tree with branches leading to scrolling screens populated by intelligent enemies. The team prototyped some interesting features: the main character would swell and shrink on collecting certain items, pre-empting Mario's growth spurts by several years, and could jump in and out of the screen in pseudo 3D – but when the directors asked for a progress report at head office, the ambitious ideas failed to impress.

"We had a one screen demo, showing off a clever technique Marc had coded, which allowed sprites on the 64 to run in front of and behind each other by changing their priorities, and some enemy flocking behaviour. But that was it. There was no real gameplay and they were not happy."

The bosses expressed their dismay by instantly cancelling the project and firing Stuart. But Liverpool in the early-Eighties was a programming boomtown, and teaming up with fellow graphic artist Colin Grunes, Stuart went in search of fresh pixels. They headed over to Thor, previously known for some lacklustre efforts, and stumbled across the boss, Paul McKenna, on an industrial estate. "He was just closing up this garage full of hundreds of cassettes, and we convinced him we were really cool artists looking for a change. He'd just hired Mark Butler from Imagine and we pitched this idea, which became *Nodes Of Yesod*."

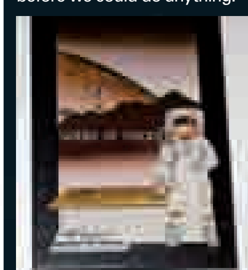
McKenna looked into their eyes, not around the eyes, and agreed. The charismatic Stuart persuaded his old mate Steve Weatherill to join him and they began work on what was to be their finest hour. *Nodes* started as a multi-directional scroller, but when the original programmer left Thor, Stuart, Steve and recent recruit Keith Robinson took the game in a different direction. "We wanted flip screens, like our major inspiration, *Underwurlde*. Colin had designed Charlie Fotheringham-Grunes' walking animation before Odin at Software Projects, but the character was actually Noddy From Toytown then – SP tried and failed to get the licence. We replaced Noddy's head with an astronaut's helmet and then had a main character. We decided that he was an upper-class astronaut as he was wearing a blazer in space and that's where the posh name came from. Besides, Colin and I wanted our names in print."

Development was not without its disasters, though. The original maps were lost when the Sinclair Microdrive they were stored on died and new maps were hastily

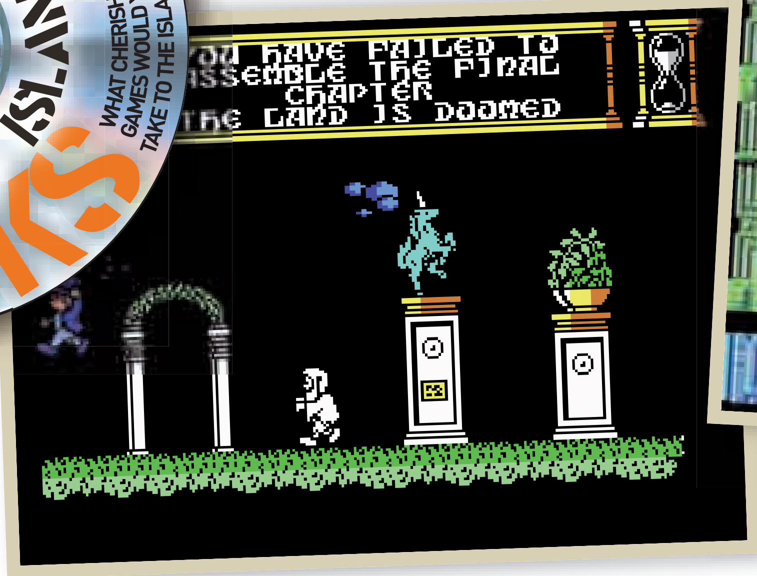
LIFE ON MARS

The working title for *Nodes Of Yesod* was *Moon Munching Moles From Mars*. However, distributors didn't think much of Thor's previous software line-up and wouldn't carry the product, resulting in a double name change. Stuart explains: "In order to be like Ultimate, Thor was re-branded Odin Computer Graphics (Ultimate's trading name was Ashby Computer Graphics) specifically to launch *Nodes*. Unfortunately, the working title didn't fit the classier company name, nor Gerry Fisher's artwork. Paul Salmon came up with the final title. *Yesod* is one of the spheres of power in the Tree of Life and a node is a meeting point of two lines."

The desire to emulate Ultimate went beyond the gameplay and graphics; the packaging and advertising was of a similarly high standard, the latter winning them a Golden Joystick award for its stylish Athena-poster mystique. "Enterprise Computers offered us a dozen Elan machines for development and we converted *Nodes* in a couple of days. They were supposed to distribute it and give us a nice percentage. Instead, they changed our cover artwork and branding without our permission and theirs was crap. We planned to sue, but they went into liquidation before we could do anything."



» Even the packaging for *Nodes* demonstrated the boys' love of all things Ultimate.



» **Right:** *Heartland*: More fine graphics and posh characters from Stuart.





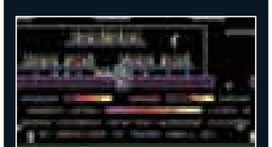
» **Above and right:** For *ICUPS* and *Mission AD*, Stuart's role was restricted to graphics rather than game design.

"THERE WAS ALL SORTS OF HIPPY SIGNIFICANCE TO THE NAME NODES OF YESOD. WE JUST THOUGHT IT SOUNDED COOL" STUART FOTHERINGHAM

STAIRWAYS TO HEAVING

The three months Stuart, Marc and Matthew spent working on their Mega-Tree project at Holt Road may have produced many grand designs on paper but only a few coding demos (check out RG 5 for Richard Burton's excellent exposé on the contents of the surviving development disks). However, between alcohol-fuelled *Rocky Horror* marathons, the trio did come up with one concrete game idea. "Marc and I designed this game *Stairways* and finished it off when we moved to Odin. *Stairways* was the biker club in Birkenhead and it was set in the nightclub. You shot bubbles out your head and tried not to kick drinks over or the bouncer would chuck you out. Very silly. It was supposed to be a tribute to Jeff Minter, who was Marc's favourite coder, but it was nowhere near as good as one of his games."

In 2004, the musketeers were reunited at Marc Wilding's 40th birthday party and Stuart has kept in touch with Matthew Smith ever since. "He's always got plans for the next big thing. Last time it was face mapping using a web cam. He was actually drawing lines on people's faces by hand to capture the distances with this program. I'm not sure how the product was going to develop from there. He's a nice bloke and I wish him well."



» Life imitating art or vice versa?



» *Robin Of The Wood* almost had a Capcom arcade conversion. 'We'd even done the specs for that.'

constructed in a single day from memory. Stuart still suspects the originals were better. And when the game did achieve a major PR coup through a glowing feature in Crash magazine, the issue was pulled from the shelves when EMAP took out an injunction against them for their Unclear User satire.

In spite of these frustrating setbacks, *Nodes* was heralded as a triumph on its release in 1985. Versions appeared for the Spectrum, C64, Amstrad and the short-lived Elan Enterprise. Conversions were begun for the BBC and MSX, before being aborted due to lack of memory, but the boys had a very Eighties idea for extending the series.

"There were all these Frankie Goes To Hollywood remixes and we thought it would be fun to do our own remix of *Nodes*. The C64 version was so efficiently coded it ran much faster than the Speccy game, so we did this fast remix on the B-side. Things really bounced around. We took that to the next level with *Arc Of Yesod*. The plan was to do a budget-label release and just change the maps and graphics, but we started playing with it and added teleporters and stuff and it became a more significant project. We thought about doing a third one, but other things happened."

The 'other thing' was *Robin Of The Wood*, to which Stuart contributed graphics. The game attracted interest from the Far East when both Capcom and Nintendo expressed an interest in Thor, now known as Odin, doing games for the NES. "They insisted we did conversions first to prove we could do it," remembers Stuart. "We said no, because we wanted to do our own IP. I didn't regret it at the time, but I was only an employee. If I was a shareholder, I probably would have."

Stuart increasingly felt his role was being marginalised. For the impressive *Heartland*, his input was restricted to graphics rather than game design, and when Odin signed a deal with Telecomsoft to produce 12 games in a year, what had been a fun job became more like working on a production line. He created graphics for *Mission AD* and *ICUPS*, but hungered for more creative involvement and duly left the company to join Denton Designs. "They let me have lots of input on games, and I really liked them socially. Doing the loading screen for *Where Time Stood Still* and working on stuff like *Mutants* was great. The programmer, Colin Parrot, was into chaos theory and emerging behaviours, which was really interesting to be part of. Plus I managed to convince Colin, Steve and Paul Salmon to leave Odin and populate another company with my friends."

It was an interesting time for Denton, too. Most of the original team had left and the company was increasingly moving toward lucrative licences like *Robocop*, rather than their own IP for the 16-bit market. "We had this idea for an Amiga and ST game called *Gargantuan*. It was going to be a scrolling shooter, which switched between horizontal and vertical scrolling and free movement. It had 12 levels based on the 12 tasks of Hercules and had this whole Greek thing going on. Everyone was working on it – before it got cancelled."

Unfortunately, Stuart had to battle his own end-of-level boss when he was struck down with glandular fever and during the months at home in Kent recovering, something changed. After nearly six years in the games industry, working on 19 titles, he decided he'd done all he wanted and it was time to move on. He resigned from Denton, and after a brief further dalliance with game development, producing graphics for *Projectyle*, a title produced by Eldritch the Cat (founded by old mates Steve and Marc) he left the industry and his goth leanings behind.

Through the Nineties, Stuart built a career in management consultancy, but his gaming past caught up with him in 1996, when he was having a drink with a colleague who was reminiscing about his old Spectrum. "He said his favourite ever game was *Nodes Of Yesod*. I said, 'You're not going to believe this…' We ended up setting up our own company and we've been business partners ever since."

Those that play together, clearly stay together and the considerable profitability of their consulting business allowed them to have a bit of fun with their abiding love. "We founded a company called Mega-Tree and put out *Gangsta* in 2004, which was envisioned as a multiplayer update of those fighting fantasy books, but with guns and drugs. We used WAP on mobile phones to write a body of text, like 'You've arrived in North London, Stoo's here and he's packing a pistol' and the text had hyperlinks in it and was dynamically constructed based on what was happening in the virtual world. You'd decide your action, click on a link and the status of the world would change."



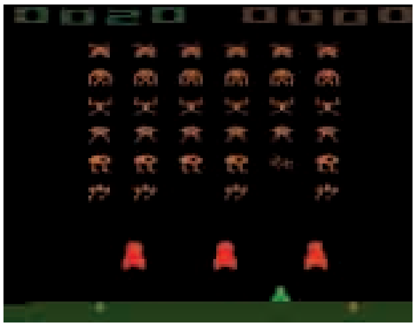
And is this innovative gaming project what's paying for that personal trainer, then? Stuart chuckles: "We had a fair amount of players, but no, it didn't break even. But you've always got to try something new – no one made any money by maintaining the status quo."



» Some guerrilla marketing and *GTA* styling didn't save *Gangsta* from getting whacked.



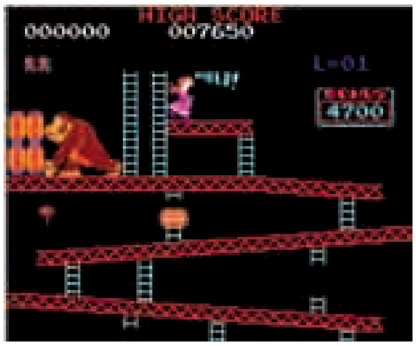
STUART FOTHERINGHAM DESERT ISLAND DISKS



SPACE INVADERS

ATARI VCS

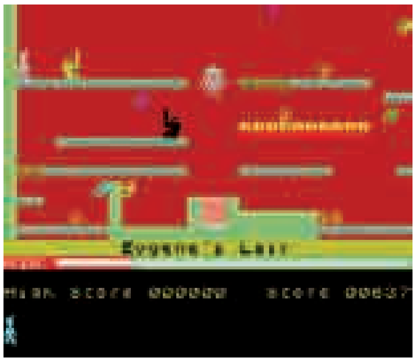
1 I loved this game to bits, and played it until I could go for an entire day with one game. This was the platform I started designing graphics for – I worked out the specs from what various games could do and what I read in the technical magazines, and drew graphics on grid paper for my imagined titles.



DONKEY KONG

ARCADE

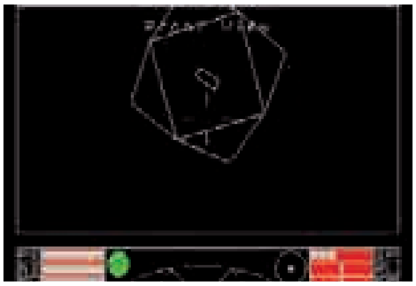
2 I played this game many times, but watched the demos and other people playing more often than not. The purpose of which was to understand how the pixels worked and the graphics were laid out. I used an entire grid pad and coloured pens to draw out all the sprites and character maps. *Donkey Kong* would affect how I wanted to do graphics for a long time.



MANIC MINER

SPECTRUM

3 I got the C64 version as soon as it was available. This was the game that made me realise that I could work in the games industry if I so chose, and the story of Matthew Smith the 17-year-old programmer was an inspiration. This game made me learn to program, but I also hacked it to bits and dumped the graphics to see how they and maps worked. Natch.



ELITE **BBC**

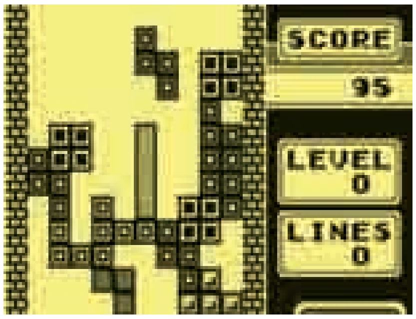
4 We bought a copy of *Elite* direct from the Acornsoft stand, at the first PCW show I went to with Software Projects, and took it back to Liverpool and a bunch of us sat up until the early hours taking turns to steer the ship. Inspiring game, stretched hardware and with clever solutions to technical problems, for example the high-resolution top screen and multi-coloured bottom control panel.



DUNGEON MASTER

ATARI ST AND AMIGA

5 I got it as soon as it came out for the Amiga and played it at home for hours and hours, getting to the point where I could play through and win by starting with the four weakest characters, then just the single weakest one. Done to death and finished lots of times. Super story, brilliant control system.



TETRIS **GAME BOY**

6 A friend of mine ran a gaming import business, and he got one of the first Japanese Game Boys. He gave me a go on *Tetris* and he never got the Game Boy back; I had to pay him for it but could not resist playing it constantly. It is the quintessential game – you can play it forever and always think the next game you'll do better.



DOOM 2 **DOS**

7 This game changed my life for a decade – I gave up Macs because of *Doom 2* and bought my first PC. It was only in 2005 that I bought a Mac again. *Doom* had impressed me, but I thought *Bungie's Marathon* on Mac was better. Then I was working on a project where we each had a PC as well as a Mac to work on. I had the *Doom 2* demo and installed it on the PC; the PC got most use for *Doom 2*.



HALF-LIFE **WINDOWS**

8 I didn't really work for nine months when this came out – luckily my business ticked over. Firstly the single-player game was brilliant; it still stands up today. Secondly, the online game was awesome; I used to hang round on the Demon servers with my mates, and started off getting fragged a bit, but after months could turn up on pretty much any server anywhere and get a 50-0 score.

RETRORATED



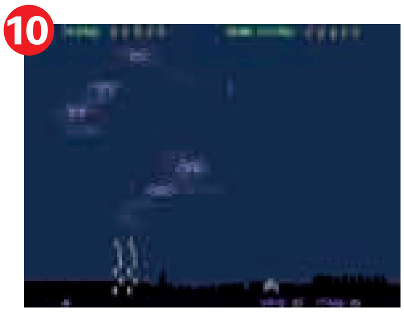
This month we look at the Top Ten Voted Retro Remakes as featured on remakes.org. We didn't have space to cover every entry, so instead we're looking at the top ten, as voted for by the event's organisers, and giving our own, occasionally conflicting, independent opinions on the matter.

DEMON ATTACK

INFORMATION

- » **AUTHOR:** HAROLD THIJSSEN
- » **ORIGINAL:** DEMON ATTACK
- » **PUBLISHER:** IMAGIC
- » **YEAR:** 1982
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 69.4%

10



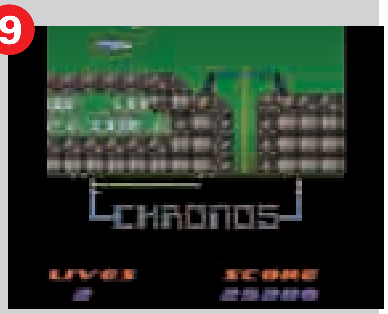
Quite a low score from the Remakes reviewers for a game in their top ten, though this is likely more due to the overall low scores seen across the board. Although basic things like automatic USB pad support are missing, it's not a bad game. Keyboard controls are precise, and there are some nice graphical effects, like trails for all the enemies – though it does have a rather antiseptic CG feel to it, as opposed to the warmer sprites of the original. Collision detection is solid, and it's a well programmed entry. It just doesn't have the wild passion you'd expect from something created by a fan. Still, it's free, so I wont grumble.

CHRONOS: A TAPESTRY OF TIME

INFORMATION

- » **AUTHOR:** KRYTEN
- » **ORIGINAL:** CHRONOS – A TAPESTRY OF TIME
- » **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- » **YEAR:** 1987
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 70%

9



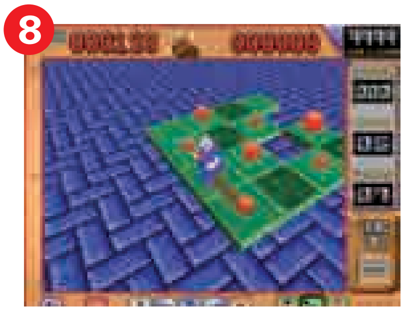
After some fiddling, we realised that, foolishly, the default difficult setting is intentionally set to have no enemies. Who in their right mind sets the default to this? Automatic loss of marks from us as a result. Once the difficulty had been ramped up to match the Speccy original, it played a lot better. The sprites are colourful which is a massive step up, the collision detection is fairly decent, and there's even joypad support. Unfortunately, the original source game, being a budget label, wasn't the greatest of titles. As such, while this is a great effort, it's derived from source material which, after extended play, is shown to be a little bland.

BOMBZUKA

INFORMATION

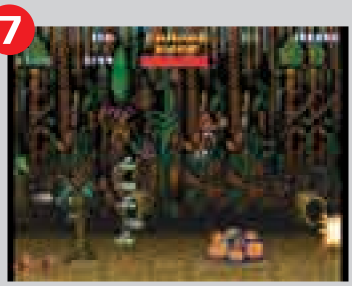
- » **AUTHOR:** XCEPT (MATT P)
- » **ORIGINAL:** BOMBUZAL
- » **PUBLISHER:** IMAGEWORKS (MIRRORSOFT)
- » **YEAR:** 1988
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 70.4%

8



This has a very professional finish to it – a lot of polish and a lot of sheen. The front end implies a great game beneath. It is fun, to a degree, but only after spending some time tweaking the controls and changing the default perspective to 2D. The three dimensional trickery on display is a little too clever for its own good, and makes the game fiendishly difficult. We have to admit that we preferred the other simpler games in the top ten, purely because they allowed more instant gratification. This also gets tough very quickly. It may seem simple, detonating bombs and avoiding the explosion, but with ever more complicated chain reactions, it's not easy.

7



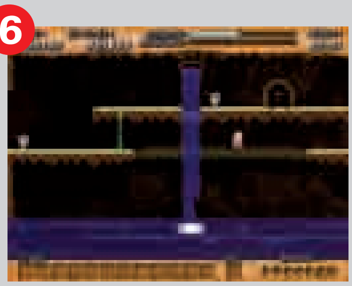
XAIN D SLEENA

INFORMATION

- » **AUTHOR:** X-OUT
- » **ORIGINAL:** XAIN D SLEENA/ SOLDIER OF LIGHT
- » **PUBLISHER:** TECHNOS JAPAN CORP
- » **YEAR:** 1986
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 70.6%

Does anyone else remember the arcade original? Probably not since it was quite obscure. As such, it's elevated somewhat due to being a remake with a purpose: introducing people to a forgotten gem, specifically one where the original suffers from slowdown. The basic concept is much like *Turrican*: a *Contra* rip-off with less fluid controls and movements, but some wilder weapons and locales. It's very good, especially with a steadier frame rate, but the controls and total inability to go anywhere but left and right soon frustrate. There's also some dreadful pixel distortion.

6



THE GOONIES 20TH ANNIVERSARY

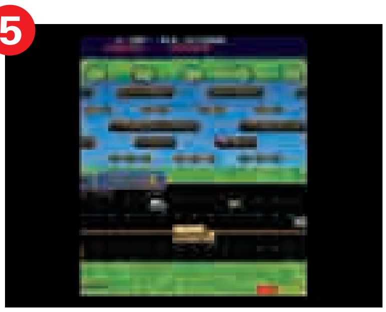
INFORMATION

- » **AUTHOR:** SANTI ONTAÑÓN
- » **ORIGINAL:** THE GOONIES
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **YEAR:** 1986
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 71.4%

Like the best updates, it improves the visuals but retains the charm of the original. Sprite design is nice, and there are some very clever visual effects. There is also some awesome Eighties music, which is in keeping with the films and the original game. Above all, it's free of glitches and plays smoothly. It feels professional and almost like a commercial product – the fact that it's 100 per cent free makes it even better. One of the best titles on show.

FROGGY RIBBIT

5



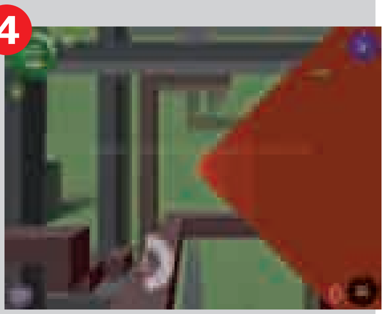
INFORMATION

- » **AUTHOR:** CHRISTOPHER MAIR
- » **ORIGINAL:** FROGGER
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **YEAR:** 1981
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 71.4%

This has one of the slickest front ends of all the remakes, and best of all it's one of the few where the programmer actually bothered to implement decent USB controls – this makes us very happy. Well done that man. The game is much like the arcade original, albeit with some rather nifty 16-bit-style graphics and improved audio. It doesn't deviate from the known gameplay formula, but, when the original works so well, is this a bad thing? It looks nice, plays so sublimely you feel almost guilty it's free – especially when some commercial titles handle like a rickety bin on wheels – and is perfect for wasting those office hours. Two thumbs up.

COUNTERCLOCKWISE

4



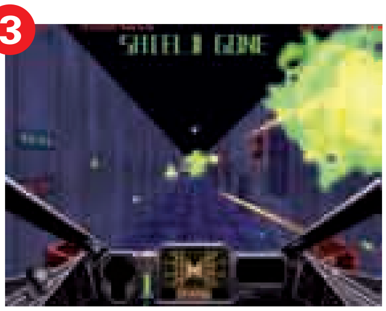
INFORMATION

- » **AUTHOR:** NENAD
- » **ORIGINAL:** KNOT IN 3D
- » **PUBLISHER:** NEW GENERATION SOFTWARE
- » **YEAR:** 1983
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 73.6%

This is why we like remakes. The original *Knot In 3D* was an ingenious concept, but it was unfortunately held back by the Spectrum's limited hardware. This, on the other hand, isn't held back by anything at all, and demonstrates just how fantastic the original idea really was – it's our favourite from the list, and the one we spent most time on. It feels like *The Lawnmower Man* as you speed through a virtual maze of columns – eerily reminiscent of dystopian visions of future cities. It's the ultimate zone-out game, and will have you utterly hypnotised as you dash about flying ever faster trying to avoid a collision and shooting down enemies. It's pure genius. We urge everyone to download this immediately.

STAR WARS

3



INFORMATION

- » **AUTHOR:** ADAM (MINION) NIGHTINGALE
- » **ORIGINAL:** STAR WARS
- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **YEAR:** 1984
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 74.4%

Maybe we're just obsessive *Star Wars* whores, but we simply couldn't get enough of Adam Nightingale's superb *Star Wars* remake.

While some could argue that the filled in polygons diminish the distinct look of the original arcade game, we found it worked extremely well and adds additional atmosphere to what is already a very immersive title. Zipping down the Death Star's trench and taking out gun emplacements is just as enjoyable now as it was back in the early Eighties and the authentic speech from the original cab is sure to send the hairs on end of anyone who has the common sense to download this excellent remake.

2



CLOCKWISER

INFORMATION

- » **AUTHOR:** CRAIG FORRESTER
- » **ORIGINAL:** CLOCKWISER
- » **PUBLISHER:** RASPUTIN
- » **YEAR:** 1994
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 79.8%

The method of voting used at Remakes.org baffles us somewhat. While this is a slick remake, with a decent front end, plus an assortment of Amiga and DOS levels from the original, the simple fact is *Clockwiser* just isn't much fun to play and it seems strange to have it in second place. It's not a bad game, especially compared to some lazy submissions, but it's as dull as hell, which raises the question of what's more important: an accurate replication of the original, or a remake that's fun? As a puzzle game it's horribly flawed, with an excessively rigid gameplay dynamic: moving blocks on one screen to match the position on another. Still, it's free, so if you're into puzzlers then try it.



1

THE PYRAMID

INFORMATION

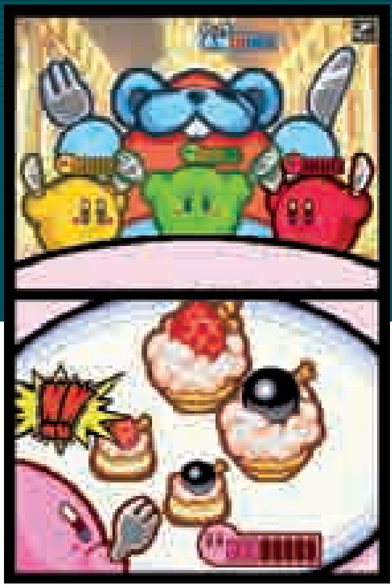
- » **AUTHOR:** PUG FUGLY
- » **ORIGINAL:** THE PYRAMID
- » **PUBLISHER:** FANTASY SOFTWARE
- » **YEAR:** 1983
- » **REMAKES.ORG SCORE:** 88.6%

This takes a while to get into but, despite us feeling it doesn't deserve the number one spot, is actually quite an intense little shooter. You control a flying vessel that must shoot either left or right while moving about, taking down hordes of spawning enemies. The intensity is akin to *Robotron*, though the limited firing directions (horizontal only) make for a very different experience. The big problem for which we could find no solution, and which leads us to feel that this was an inappropriate winner, is the inability to fire in one direction while moving in another – as a result you will often collide with enemies while trying to line up a shot.

RETRORATED

» LOOKS LIKE BUBBLEGUM, TASTES LIKE BRIE

KIRBY SQUEAK SQUAD



» This cake-eating mini-game is utterly adorable, and makes fun use of the stylus.

DO THE KIRBY DANCE: <('_'<) (^'_'^) (>'_')>



» **SYSTEM:** NDS
» **PRICE:** TBA
» **RELEASED:** TBA
» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** HAL/FLAGSHIP
» **PLAYERS:** 1-4



» Jump little Kirby! Jump higher and avoid that massive boulder which is chasing you!



Do you remember *Kirby's Adventure* from around 1993? It was a title with arguably more depth and complexity than *Super Mario World*, and yet it was a very humble NES title. Multiple paths through levels, myriad secrets to discover, and a fantastic dynamic of collecting enemies' powers to use against them (which were many and diverse). If like this reviewer your experience of the *Kirby* franchise extends solely to this sublime NES version (and vastly inferior GB Dreamland title, which lacked the ability to attain enemy powers), then *Kirby Squeak Squad* will prove wonderfully nostalgic and enjoyable.



» Unable to satisfy his insatiable hunger, Kirby resorts to gobbling up passers by. Thinking about it, this game is a bit disturbing.



OPINION

Yes, it looks nice, and yes, it's reminiscent of the NES classic. But this simply didn't engage me like past outings have. Along with being easy, the game felt both formulaic and prosaic – I found myself going through it without really paying attention, which soon led to boredom and being distracted by the TV weather girl on Sky News.

Darran jones

Nearly all the tunes should be recognisable from past *Kirby* titles, and they're still likely to make you bop your head in-time, like some kind of crazy loon getting odd looks from his long-suffering colleagues. It also has the same mechanics of rewarding exploration with secret bonus stages. There are mini-bosses, proper guardians, power-up rooms, and plentiful extra lives to make the game as painless as possible; it has absolutely everything you'd associate with a *Kirby* game. But it also has so very much more.

Kirby Squeak Squad features some awesome new power-ups, including one which turns you into a Ryu-like character capable of dragon punches, hurricane kicks and even fireballs. It's also possible to store (and sometimes combine) items and power-ups in the lower screen, for easy access later on in the game. This all means that you're seldom stuck in a situation with the wrong powers or, worse still, with no powers at all. *Kirby Squeak Squad* improves on an already excellent formula tremendously, and, fortunately, the stylus controls aren't obtrusive.

Some people might not get it, some might even accuse it of being boring; these people are too cynical – it's simply a game with a different kind of pace. There's no time limit and Kirby can fly infinitely, making it a game whereby it's the journey not the ultimate goal which is intended for enjoyment. Play it sedately, relax, put your feet up and just enjoy it for what it is: a fun game which aims at being jovial and nice rather than overly challenging. Our one complaint is not its easiness, but rather its brevity – there is a difference. The NES game was also very easy, but it made up for this with a plethora of diverse levels which, despite seldom proving challenging, meant there was plenty to work through. Still, it has a definite magic to it if you're in the right frame of mind.

IN SUMMARY

Blithe, mirthsome, light-hearted, and relaxingly fun. *Kirby Squeak Squad* is a wonderful little *Kirby* title.



RATING **85%**

OPINION

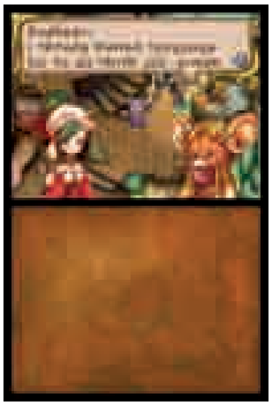
I utterly adore the 2D graphics in this. Believe us when we say that every minute we were gleefully laughing at a new comedy outfit or animation of Kirby's. One particularly mirthsome moment was when he acquired the magician's hat, and, when starting to run, would lift his chubby little arms up to hold it in place. An adorable title.

Simon Phillips

» CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION? DON'T BE SILLY

CHILDREN OF MANA

PERFECTLY MANA-GABLE



- » **SYSTEM:** NDS
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** SQUARE-ENIX
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



Ever since we first encountered its glorious Mode 7 intro we immediately fell in love with Square's *Secret Of Mana*. Granted, it wasn't the first game in the series, but everything about it, from its engaging characters to beautifully woven narrative, was honed to perfection.

Square-Enix's latest continuation of its classic franchise may not reach the lofty heights of its universally loved predecessor (although, to be fair, hardly any other game in the series has either) but it does capture the all-important spirit that the classic SNES title and its Japanese-only sequel *Seiken Densetsu 3* possessed – and that's no mean feat.

Perhaps one of the weakest aspects of *Children Of Mana* is its weak storyline and structure. It paints a tale of good versus evil that's been told a hundred times before – and far better – and often serves as little more than an excuse to visit the next dungeon and battle *COM*'s admittedly very impressive bosses.

If the storyline has taken a hit, the actual combat is as good as ever and proves to be one of *COM*'s greatest strengths. Instantly accessible thanks to its real-time roots, and made easier by one of 12 spirits that you're able to take into battle with you, you can simply get on with hacking and slashing your way through the gorgeously designed locations (*Children Of Mana* is quite possible one of the prettiest DS games ever made). While there are only four different weapons there are plenty of variations of them to discover and you'll constantly find yourself fighting with your team-mates over the best items. Indeed, it's the heavy bias on team exploration and combat that makes up for *COM's* shortcomings as a fully fledged RPG, and greatly expands on what quickly becomes a rather dull single player experience, even with the many side quests that Square-Enix has included. Teaming up with a couple of friends is superb fun and greatly extends *Children Of Mana*'s longevity no end.

Like *Castlevania*, Square's *Mana* series is another title that has slowly lost its way with recent releases. Luckily, both franchises do show plenty of potential. They just need to be perfectly executed.

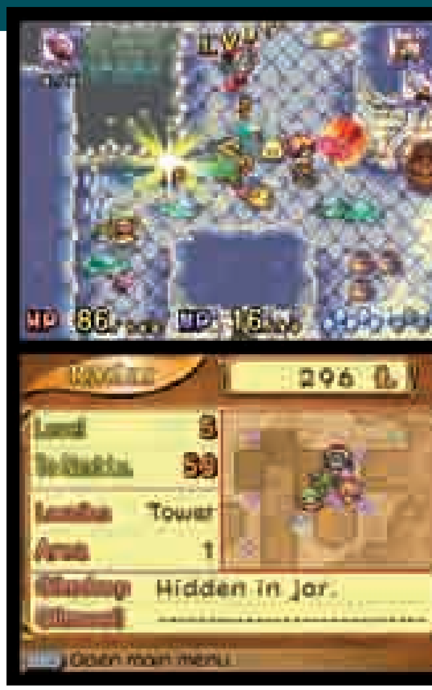


OPINION

I'm a huge fan of both *Secret of Mana* and its Japanese only sequel, and while *Children of Mana* is good fun, it's not quite the game I was hoping for. It's far more of a dungeon hack than the previous games, and while the story elements are rather simplistic, the multiplayer action more than makes up for it.

Jon Szczepaniak





IN SUMMARY

While limited as a single-player game, *Children Of Mana*'s gameplay is greatly boosted when a few friends join you. An interesting twist on the series. Let's hope the next outing allows you to play online.

RATING	75%



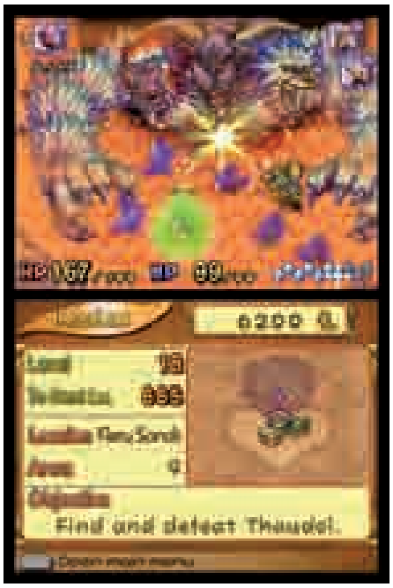
OPINION

Hmm, I can't really make up my mind about this. I was never a huge fan of the Game Boy's *Sword Of Mana*, and this is far too similar for my liking. The RPG elements are almost non-existent the main quests all basically have you doing the same thing, while the constant hacking and slashing soon gets boring when you're playing on your own. It does look bloody lovely though.

Simon Phillips



» Playing with three other players gets quite frantic and often very underhanded…



» Like previous *Mana* titles, the bosses are absolutely massive and often extremely difficult to kill.



» Quite possibly the most astounding looking DS game we've ever played. If you can think of another, drop us a line.

LOAD UP ON GUNS, AND BRING YOUR FRIENDS

METAL SLUG ANTHOLOGY

HEAVY MACHINEGUN!



- **SYSTEM:** PSP
- **PRICE:** £34.99
- **RELEASED:** FEB 2007
- **PUBLISHER:** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** SNK PLAYMORE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2



This magnificent retro compilation – so far the only one to rival Sega's *Mega Drive Collection* – opens with a display proclaiming this to be the series' tenth anniversary "*Metal Slug* since 1996." While technically released in 2007, we couldn't help but shed a tear at the gravitas of this moment. We recall 1996 and the days when *Metal Slug* was an underground phenomenon, and having played, or even owned the prized Neo-Geo MVS version, was a sign or status among prominent aficionados. At long last the entire series, sadly with the exception of the handheld versions, is now available for the masses.

Despite being synonymous with SNK and its Neo-Geo hardware, *Metal Slug* was not created by SNK but rather a little-known group called Nazca, formed from ex-Irem members. This is why Irem titles like *Undercover Cop*, *Gunforce 2* (which is a pseudo-prequel to *Metal Slug* regarded by some as better than the original *Slug*), and *Kaitei Daisensou* (aka: *In The Hunt*) all bear a distinctive stylistic resemblance to *Metal Slug*. The main driving force behind such painfully exquisite pixel art is a pair known only as Akio (sprites and animation) and Susumu (backgrounds). These two people went on to work on other games besides the *Slug* series though, with Akio apparently leaving the team after *Metal Slug 3*. Also, the main guy behind *Undercover Cop* at Irem, Meeheer, went on to become one of the lead designers at Nazca and then SNK for the *Slug* games. Further confusing the trivia is that a Capcom programmer Hamachan left after working on *Street Fighter Alpha* to also join Nazca. This gives the *Metal Slug*s something of an all-star devteam, previously responsible for some true arcade classics. Not surprising, considering how good the series is.

The compilation is almost utterly perfect. Unless you included the GBA and Neo-Geo Pocket versions, there is no conceivable way of improving this. Emulation is faultless (with a choice of three aspect ratios) – though there is some loading in later versions, there is a gluttonously indulgent amount of unlockables (including an interview). You can save anywhere you like, and the game contains the new PS2 *Metal Slug 6* which alone costs the same as this compilation. It doesn't matter whether you like *Metal Slug* or not, or even if you don't own a PSP, we say you should buy this. Right now.





Metal Slug 6 introduces some new characters, the ability to carry two weapons, and a score multiplier. A return to form.





Tanks. Lots of tanks. Especially chubby tanks. This is the staple of *Metal Slug*. In fact, 'Chubby Tank Busters' would have been a better title.



OPINION

While it's great to see seven of my favourite games on one UMD I'm not convinced that they work well on PSP. Neither the D-pad nor the analogue nub are good enough for *Metal Slug* and I'd much rather be playing on a big screen. Still, if these kind of things don't bother you then *Anthology* comes highly recommended.

Ashley Day

IN SUMMARY

Finally the world's gaming plebeians can rise above their stations and experience what we've known for a decade.

RATING **91%**



OPINION

It's interesting that Ash should pick up on *Slug's* controls, as I have no problem with them. The PSP is fastly becoming the console of choice for classic retro ports and if *Slug* proves to be a success perhaps we'll see more goodies from SNK Playmore. Is anyone else gagging for a *King of Fighters* compilation?

Darran Jones

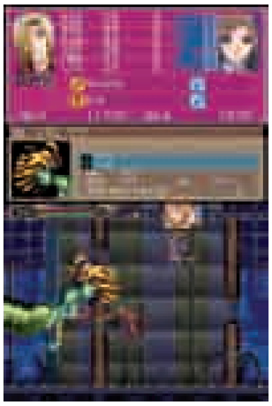




» "WHIP CRACKAWAY, WHIP CRACKAWAY, WHIP CRACKAWAY!"

CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

1 + 1 = MISSED OPPORTUNITY



- » **SYSTEM:** NDS
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** 23 FEBRUARY 2007
- » **PUBLISHER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1 (1-2 ONLINE)



When we first got wind of *Portrait Of Ruin* we became very excited. After all, the previous DS *Castlevania* game, *Dawn Of Sorrow* had been excellent and *Portrait Of Ruin* sounded just as good. It was to take place in a brand new setting (that of World War II) and, best of all, would feature an online multiplayer and stages that were more in style with some of the early *Castlevania*s. Sadly for us, while *Portrait Of Ruin* promises plenty, it actually manages to deliver very little, a pity as the potential is there for all to see.

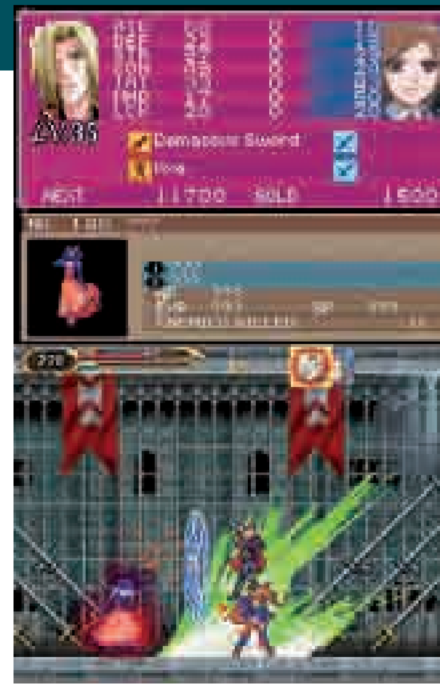
Part of this problem lies with Konami itself. While it has been quick to trumpet the many new innovations of *Portrait Of Ruin* it hasn't really done all that much with them. The end result is a solid and enjoyable title that constantly hints at the greatness that a lengthier development time and playtesting would have undoubtedly offered. This is most noticeable with the much-vaunted online play. Yes, it's the first time we've ever gone online in a *Castlevania* game, but rather than getting to explore the main game with a friend, you're left with a rather disappointing boss-rush to plough through. It's okay, but you can't help but wonder how glorious it would have been to explore Dracula's castle with a buddy. *Portrait Of Ruin*'s second character is also a missed opportunity. While Jonathan and Charlotte have some nice abilities between them (he's handy with weapons, she's a dab hand at magic) their actual teamwork abilities are vastly underused. There are a few standout moments – stopping a speeding train and switching constantly to defeat certain bosses – but they're too far apart to really make an impact. It's almost as if Konami has been too scared to mess with what has now become a rather stale formula.

What is welcome though, are the new portraits that effectively act as portals to new environments. Yes, they're horribly linear and have little to do with the Second World War, but they do invoke a powerful nostalgia that perfectly captures the spirit of titles like *Super Castlevania IV*.

Portrait Of Ruin offers an exciting glimpse into the franchise's future, now all Konami has to do is fully realise it.



» Later enemies are extremely tough so make sure you're at a high enough level to tackle them.



» No *Castlevania* title is complete without impressive bosses and *Portrait Of Ruin* is no exception.

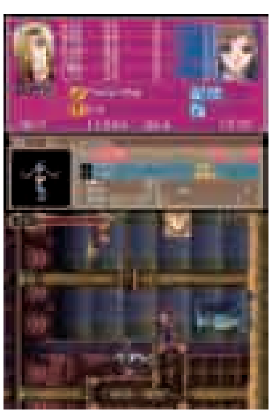


OPINION

I'm a fan of the *Castlevania* series, and I believe that this is an excellent addition to the classic franchise. Yes the dialogue is awful (the storyline carries on from the Mega Drive's *Castlevania: Blood Lines*) and the vast majority of sprites seem to have been wrenched from earlier GBA *Castlevania*s but there can be no denying that this is a bloody good romp. Granted, it's far from perfect, but the direction the series now seems to be heading in shows massive potential.

Ashley Day







IN SUMMARY

Yes. The series is getting a little long in the tooth, but Konami's latest *Castlevania* certainly shows plenty of promise. Let's hope things are better implemented should a future sequel get made.

RATING **80%**



OPINION

Jipped. That's how I'm feeling at the moment. Portrait of Ruin is obviously an experiment by IGA to take the series in a new direction. Now I've no problem with this, but the end execution is almost as if he has no confidence in the actual direction he has taken, which is a real pity as he's definately on the right track. Let's hope the next DS outing is far more self-assured. Oh, and give us proper co-op please.

Simon Phillips

DOUBLE DRAGON

BROTHERS IN ARMS



- **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- **DEVELOPER:** TECHNOS
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £40+PCB BOARD



HISTORY

There's an ageless quality about Technos' classic brawler that still makes it enjoyable to play some 20 years after its original release. Granted the Lee brothers' first adventure was quickly superseded by titles such as *Final Fight*, *The Simpsons* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, but at the time of release nothing could touch it and it deservedly became a huge hit.

Interestingly though, for all its bright, cartoony visuals and fast-paced gameplay, *Double Dragon* is a far from perfect game, and has an annoying little oversight (some might even say flaw) that instantly changes the dynamics of what is initially a very competent combat system.

Using a similar three-button system to Technos' previous brawler *Renegade*, the Lee brothers were able to stun opponents with a deft flurry of punches, kick 'em in the mush with an athletic high kick, or – best of all – grab them by their hair and brutally knee them in the face until the poor thug's visage no doubt resembled Angel's battered mug in *Fight Club*. It's all glorious fun and is extremely well-balanced, until you discover that you can make far better progress through *Double Dragon*'s five stages by either delivering a deadly elbow with a stab of the punch and jump buttons, or by simply double-tapping the joystick and delivering a devastating head butt.

Amazingly, even when you discover these two ridiculously powerful moves *Double Dragon* remains immensely enjoyable to play – most probably because of its excellent multiplayer mode.

Teaming up with a friend and 'accidentally' kneeing them in the head a few times because you thought they were the enemy never fails to raise a smile, and the final brawl where you frantically try to out-punch your mate in order to win Marian's affections remains just as thrilling as it was in '87.

Yes it's far from perfect, but we'll pick *Double Dragon* over its sequels any day of the week, and with Xplosiv recently announcing its imminent arrival on Xbox Live Arcade, it would appear that the beatings are about to begin all over again.




SCOOP

BARGAIN HUNT

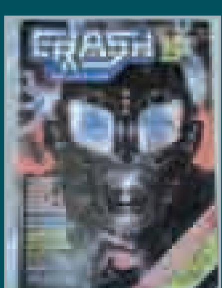
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japan auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

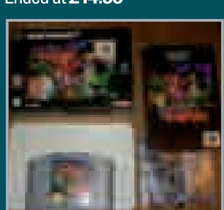
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or lower than it normally would) you'll find them listed here.

CRASH ISSUE 1
MAGAZINE
Normally sells for **NA**
Ended at **£23.10**



BANJO KAZOOIE
N64
Normally sells for **£5+**
Ended at **£14.55**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**

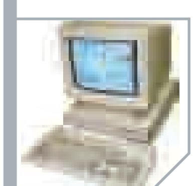


PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**

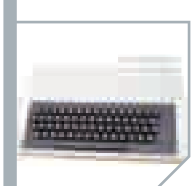


PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

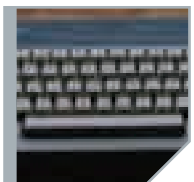
ACORN



ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (with games)**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).

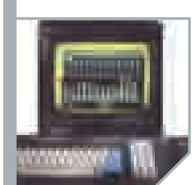


BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE

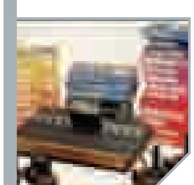


APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) (with games)**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built machine and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



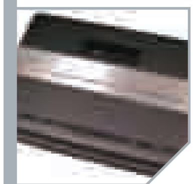
2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

- ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- HEN'S TEETH
- LUCKY FIND
- EBAY REGULAR
- CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



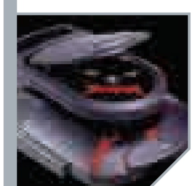
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

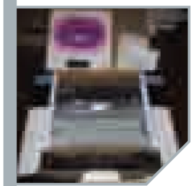


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

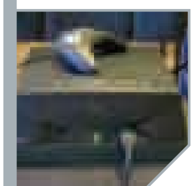
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



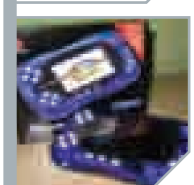
PIPPIN(ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. It's high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



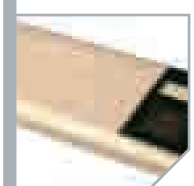
AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND

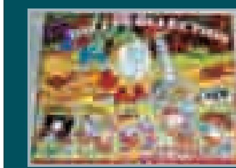


C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

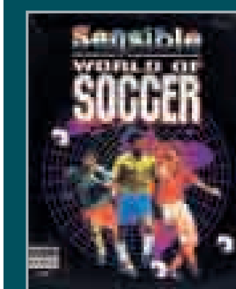


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

DIZZY COLLECTION
SPECTRUM
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£17.61**



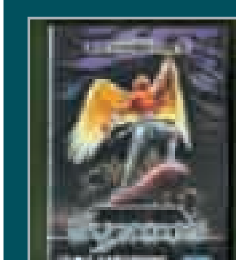
SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER
AMIGA
Normally sells for **£3.50**
Ended at **59 pence**



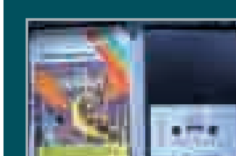
SUNSET RIDERS
SNES
Normally sells for **£8+**
Ended at **£2.91**



GYNOUG
MEGA DRIVE
Normally sells for **£2.50**
Ended at **£9.01**



THE HOBBIT
SPECTRUM
Normally sells for **£1+**
Ended at **£7.50**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



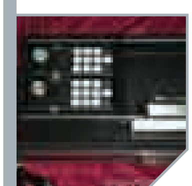
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
– Stephen King's The Stand (paperback)
– William Gibson's Neuromancer (paperback)
– R.A. Salvatore's Starless Night (paperback)



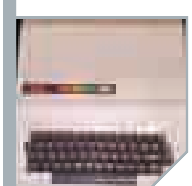
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More inanity from the land of the rising sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (from the USA)**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
-CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) (very cheap on eBay)**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
Another attempt by Sony to enter the videogame hardware market (after the MSX), this time they took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSOne, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPE
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) (allegedly for a mint system)**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer which didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



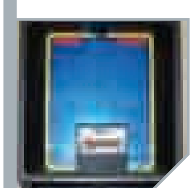
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



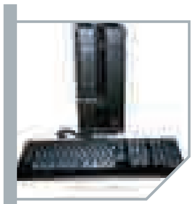
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

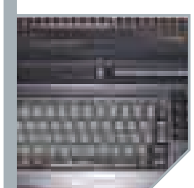
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

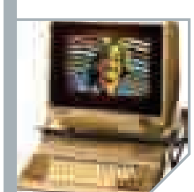


MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

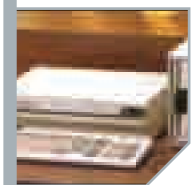
NEC



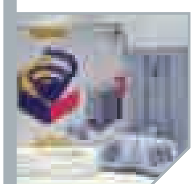
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



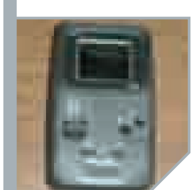
PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not mutually compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



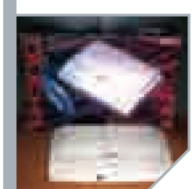
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had 6 games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a 6 button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over a 1000 games to choose from!



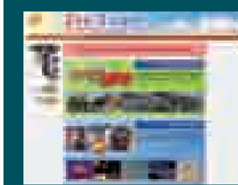
FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



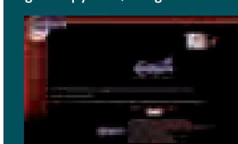
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned,

RETRO GAMING SITES

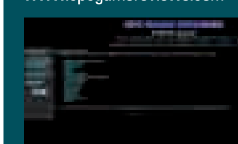
ZEE-3.COM
The Pickford brothers have once again decided to go it alone. As well as being able to download the truly excellent *Naked War*, the Pickford's site all includes several fascinating looks at the industry from their own perspective. Find out more by heading on over to www.zee-3.com



THE CASTLEVANIA DUNGEON
If this month's review of *Castlevania: Portrait Of Ruin* has got you excited check this out. Filled with reviews, a history line and hundreds of beautiful images, it's the best *Castlevania* site we've seen. http://castlevania.classicgaming.gamespy.com/dungeon.html



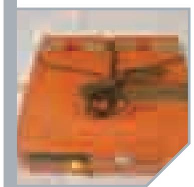
CPC GAME REVIEWS
If you've fancied a CPC 464 but never knew what games to pick up you'll find this site to be a valuable tool. With over 1,300 games reviewed, CPC Game Reviews is one of the most comprehensive CPC sites. Has helpful, if short, reviews. www.cpcgamereviews.com



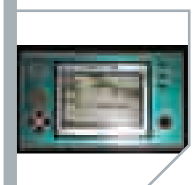
RADIO SEGA
After a lengthy absence while owner Mark Kidley settled into university, Radio Sega is back. Filled with an amazing array of classic Sega tunes, it's a superb radio site that has something for everyone. Point your mouse over to www.radiosega.net



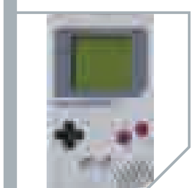
the drive belts break very easily.



SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



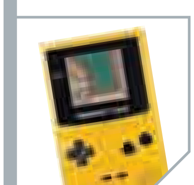
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite it's age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact GB, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic GB. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
»» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of their cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72 pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of their most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



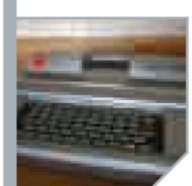
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips.The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (more with DVC)**
Consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance it's capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc.**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (according to eBay)**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
»» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer

hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II

» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» » PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**

The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.



GENESIS 3

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.

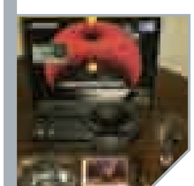


NOMAD

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**

Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**

CDX/Xeye

A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**

Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (more with games)**

Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



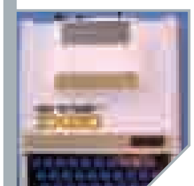
SATURN

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR



ZX-80

» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) Apparently if boxed and mint**

Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81

» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**

Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
-SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +3

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**

The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

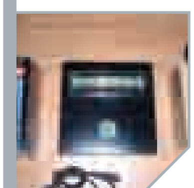
SNK



NEOGEO AES

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**

High powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) (multi-slot systems cost more)**

High powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted).

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- WAKU WAKU 7



NEOGEO CD

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**

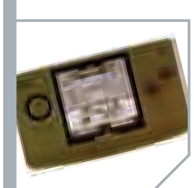


NEOGEO CDZ

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**

CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEOGEO POCKET COLOR

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

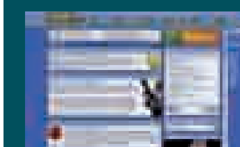
Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

LEMON64

We've said it before and we'll say it again. Lemon64 is quite simply one of the best resources around for anyone with a love of Commodore's 8-bit computer. There are hundreds of screenshots and box covers to drool over, a bustling and informative forum and an essential guide to the top 100 games you should play. www.lemon64.com



RETRO REMAKES

With its 2006 competition just finishing with over 75 new remakes there's never been a better time to visit this excellent website. Filled with an assortment of classic remakes, you're bound to find that at least one of your favourite games of old has been given a fresh new lick of paint. Oh, and make sure you check out Ovine By Design's excellent *Total Eclipse* remake. It's awesome. www.retroremakes.com



IMAGINE PUBLISHING ESHOP

Okay, so it's not exactly retro, but as Imagine Publishing has just opened its very own eShop, we thought you might like to know a little more about it. Basically it will allow you to order Imagine magazines, including of course Retro Gamer, from anywhere in the world. And as an added bonus it's possible to get the recent gamesTM Retro anthology for just £9.99. Bargain. www.imagineshop.co.uk

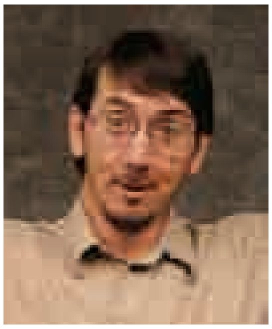


Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

RETRO SCENE

WRIGHT TIME, WRIGHT PLACE

SIMS CREATOR TO RECEIVE PRESTIGIOUS AWARD



» Yay! And the winner is…

Will Wright, the creator of *Sim City, The Sims* and the incoming *Spore* recently picked up the Producers Guild of America's prestigious Vanguard Award. Presented to Wright on 20 January, the award recognises outstanding achievements in both new media and technology. Wright is to be the first gaming veteran to ever win one of the coveted awards.

"Will Wright is an icon of the gaming industry and one of the great producers of entertainment," revealed Mark Gordon, the PGA's Vice President of Television, who went on to say, "his creations have transcended into feature films and continue to entertain a global audience. We are proud to have him be the first Vanguard recipient from the gaming universe."

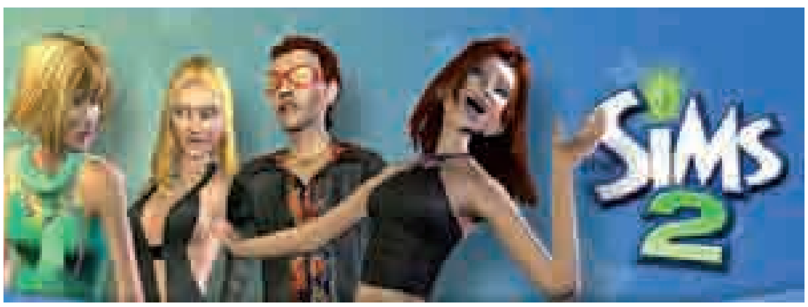
Wright himself is also pleased with the recent award stating, "The PGA's decision to honour a game designer is a big moment for game designers such as myself, and those who would like to follow in our footsteps. The PGA is signalling that games are an integral part of the entertainment industry, and an art form that's worthy of recognition. For that reason, I am incredibly honoured to be the first game designer to receive the Vanguard Award."

Wright's new accolade certainly puts him in some very high company; previous winners include George Lucas, James Cameron, Pixar Entertainment and Jon Millar, then head of AOL as it moved from being an internet provider to a media and content provider.

This year's event will also see Jerry Bruckheimer receive the Norman Lear Achievement Award in Television for shows such as *CSI* and *Cold Case*, while Ken Ehrlich is to receive the Visionary Award for merging medias.

Despite receiving countless Life Time achievement awards this must surely be Wright's longest day in the sun, as the award recognises not just that gaming is a converse media, but that Wright more than anybody has been both instrumental and influential in bringing it to the masses – who knows where we might have been without him?

Just for perspective on how far gaming has come, try and imagine Jeff Minter receiving an award alongside John Huston. You can't can you.



» Who'd have thunk it. *The Sims* finally manage to get gaming some proper recognition.

NOW WITH 40% MORE PHAT

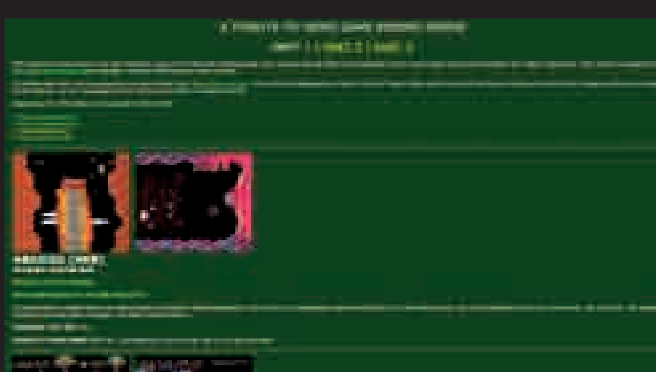
RETRO GAMING MUSIC SITE KOHINA RECEIVES MASSIVE NEW UPDATE

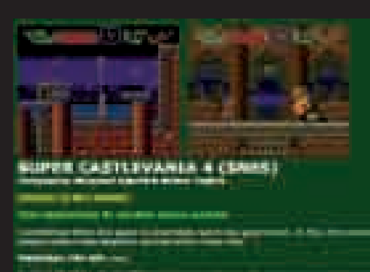
One of Retro Gamers favourite websites has received an update this month, increasing its content by over 40%. The already Retro-laden music site Kohina has updated its roster and expanded its servers to include many previously unavailable retro music tracks and makes for some great listening. Operating as a free Radio Station, Kohina has updated its service to include browser listening, and now features a comprehensive play list that includes titles from the likes of Rob Hubbard, Martin Galway and many, many more.

The inappropriately named Kohina (Finnish for White Noise) also has music tracks available from the late Eighties and early Nineties demo and modding scenes, so if you ever had a friend who dabbled in 'the scene' the John-Michel Jarre-esque music will sound more than familiar to you.

While on the subject of great web sites receiving updates, Flying Omelette www.flyingomelette.com/top50songs.html has compiled its all time top 50 game-ending songs. Featuring the great and the good from the last 30 years, this is compulsive listening for anybody with even a passing interest in games, replete with composer and artist information; this is possibly the best resource of its type on the net at the moment. Featuring midi and mp3 versions of each song it's a fantastic article and is definately worth looking at. Our ending of choice is *Super Castlevania IV*, it's sublime.

» Despite the matrix overtones this really is a great idea, much better in the browser option though.





» The ending to *Super Castlevania IV* is a beautifully sorrowful tune. Don't take our word for it though; listen to it now.

CALLING ALL WINNERS

THE NINTH ANNUAL INDEPENDENT GAMES FESTIVAL PREPARES TO KICK OFF



» You wouldn't believe how ridiculous some people's car engine noises can sound.



» *Castle Crashers* is already looking like an excellent scrolling fighter and should sit nicely alongside *Robo Blitz* when it's released later this year.

The finalists for the ninth annual independent games festival have finally been announced, and this year the list of titles seems to encompass more variety than we have ever seen before.

In the competition's history previous winners such as *Darwinia* and *Ninja Loves Pirate* have gone on to find great success, displaying traditional yet unique game mechanics. The games' style of taking classic gameplay and giving it a new spin has proven immensely popular.

The 2007 final is to be held during the Game Developers Conference in March and will feature the qualifying finalists from the earlier rounds. These earlier rounds have seen a not insubstantial 141 games entered, played and pushed to breaking point by the willing judges (a role which must vary from being great fun, to enormously frustrating).

As the finalists battle it out over six categories, the final promises to be a real tempest of opportunity and genius, as concepts are realised without the various corporate restraints that have significantly slowed gaming innovation down since the halcyon days of the arcades and 8-bit-micros (or so some would argue).

Pushing the boundaries of what is considered the norm is something that the Independent Games Festival has managed to achieve consistently year in year out. Fortunately, after a small inspection of the classes and the respective entrants, we would suggest that this year carries perhaps more potential than all of the previous competitions – making us keenly anticipate the results.

Nominated in the most categories this year and an early favourite to win the grand prize is *Everyday Shooter* by Queasy Games. Each level is a different game, and each game is a shooter, playing like an explosive visual history of the shoot-'em-ups. *Everyday Shooter* really must be seen to be believed and it is a testament to the kind of quality you can expect at this year's show. Indeed, some games have already been bought up before the final. *Robo Blitz*, for example, has been available on Xbox Live Arcade for a couple of months now and The Behemoth's follow up to *Alien Hominid*, *Castle Crashers* is soon to appear on Microsoft's download service as well. Certainly things are looking good for the future of the competition.

The game that we're really looking forward to though is *Racing Pitch* by Helsinki-based Skinflake. Looking like an XNA-styled *Super Sprint*, *Racing Pitch*'s truly innovative feature is that control of the car is removed from all the normal peripherals and has the player making engine noises into a microphone – the faster and louder you rev, the quicker the car goes. Awesome and genuinely different to anything we've seen before.

Keep an eye on future issues of Retro Gamer for more information, reviews and previews or head over to www.igf.com/2007finalistswinners.html#main.



» *Aquaria* is an amazingly beautiful and independent game that rivals *Ico* in the quality stakes.

RETRO SCENE

STAR DEFENDER PUTS IN A… STAR TURN AND WE TRY TO TACKLE PHANTOMAS SAGA INFINITY'S BAFFLING STORY. AND FAIL.

retro GAMER SIZZLER

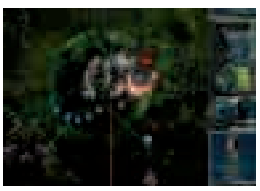
STAR DEFENDER III

STARS NEED PROTECTING TOO

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS PC
» **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
» **PRODUCED BY:** AWEM STUDIO
» **LINK:** WWW.AWEM.COM/STAR_DEFENDER_3
» **PRICE:** £9.99
» **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY



» Getting a high score was easy for Mike; mainly because no one else had a go…

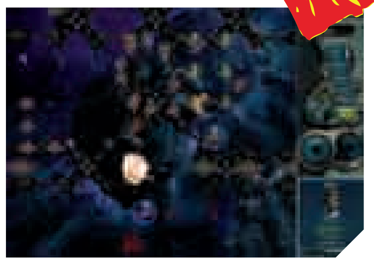


» There are plenty of huge bosses in *Star Defender III* and they all take a hammering.

Dona Bailey first designed the seminal *Centipede* way back in 1980, Ed Log added some whiz bangs and a classic was born. It's hard to imagine some quarter of a century later that a theme littered with classic games was spawned from the imagination of a rather well to do lady long before a new wave punk by the name of Adam had even contemplated an *Ant Invasion*.

None of the above is lost on *Star Defender III* – on loading a feeling of comfort sets in. The longer you have played videogames, the stronger the feeling. Narration informs the uninitiated that it is "2743AD, two years since the last war, and the Insectus return with a new wave" and that's all you need to know. Taking the form of a classic shoot-'em-up, *Star Defender III* casts the player in the role of Earth's last line of defence during the final battles of a war that has been raging for years.

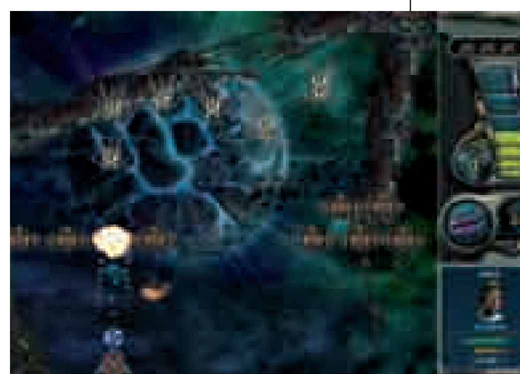
The player's ship, while cemented to the bottom of the screen, moves swiftly from side-to side-pulled along by the mouse – the left button controls standard shots and the right, additional weapons. These extra guns are imperative to the success of the game. Falling in abundance from departed invaders they add a strategy that is lacking in many of *Star Defender*'s peers and provide a necessary advantage when arriving at the numerous Boss and Sub Boss encounters. The Insectus themselves have their DNA rooted firmly in the Earth's insect kingdoms, while their intelligence is clearly from the arcades. The game has the swathing attack patterns reminiscent of *Centipede*, *Galaga*, *Phoenix*, *Turrican* and *Raiden*.



» So many bugs to shoot, so little time to do it. It's time to call in the exterminators.

Despite the early stages' tame difficulty settings, by level 3 *Star Defender* really starts to show its teeth, and boy are they fearsome. While the sounds effects are exactly as you'd expect from a game of this ilk, the music is a real testimony to how far independent games developers have come. Imagine the Prodigy being turned into flood and then somehow releasing an album, and if you can't imagine that? Well we can guarantee you, something special awaits you.

RATING: 92%

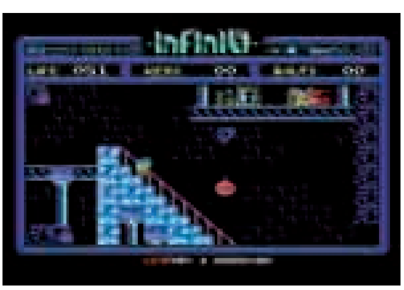


» If you're a fan of shoot-'em-ups what are you doing reading this? Download it now!

PHANTOMAS SAGA INFINITY

A STORY THAT GOES ON AND ON

» **FORMAT:** ZX SPECTRUM CASSETTE AMSTRAD CPC CASSETTE/DISK MSX CARTRIDGE
» **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
» **PRODUCED BY:** CEZ TEAM 2006
» **LINK:** HTTP://CEZGS.COMPUTEREMUZONE.COM
» **PRICE:** £4.99-£6.99
» **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY



» There's the lock (bolt) now if I could only find a key…

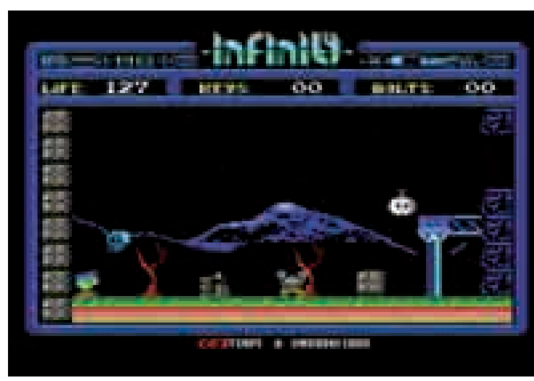
***Phantomas Saga Infinity* has one of the longest back-stories and introductions Retro Gamer has ever seen. The abridged version reads something like this: Phantomas discovers that he is not human but has been created as an android thief (*Blade Runner* anyone?), in the Android Thief Factory no less. As his creators have opted to leave the galaxy and change time he is fading into non-existence; however by destroying the Android Thief Factory he can save himself. Stephen Hawkins could possibly make this easier to understand, but unfortunately my limited intelligence prevents me from doing the same, so let us leave it there and get into the game.**

Oddly, considering the convoluted and overlong backstory, *Phantomas Saga Infinity* is a straight, down the line platform game. Phantomas must collect ten keys and place them in ten locks. This then destroys different parts of the factory. As each lock is opened a timer is introduced that means Phantomas must move to safety before the impending explosion, and then it's on to the next lock. As has been said before, the simplest ideas are always the best.

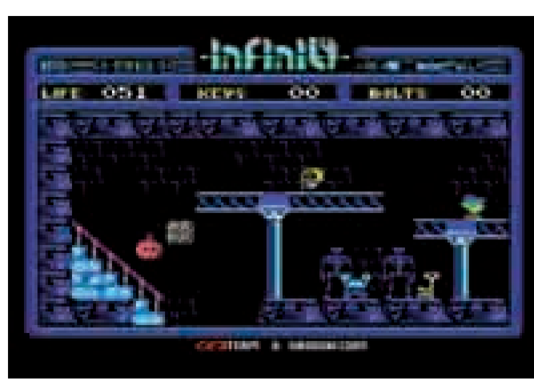
Phantomas is an addictive, if somewhat unforgiving platformer that offers plenty of challenge and longevity. Reminiscent in some ways of *Dynamite Dan* and *Monty Mole* it's refreshing to discover a recently released 8-bit game that's genuinely worth all the praise that's being showered upon it (and not because it just happens to be a new release). While the MSX version is really the one to own, *Phantomas* is just as polished on the Spectrum and Amstrad and it's somewhat refreshing to play a new release that's not currently available on the Commodore 64 only (not that we have anything against the Commodore 64, we hope you understand).

Crisp and clear sprites, some audacious level design and a great soundtrack all combine to make *Phantomas* a real treat for the eyes and ears. Yes it's tricky in places, but there's no denying that it's a lot of fun as well. Let's hope we get a follow-up.

RATING: 80%



» Space hoppers don't tend to feature in many games these days.



» Save keys to open doors, sorry wrong game.

Remake of the Month

EVERY MONTH WE LOOK AT OUR FAVOURITE REMAKES; THIS MONTH IT'S STAR WARS AMD BOMBZUKA

STAR WARS

"THE FORCE IS STRONG IN THIS ONE…"



- » **FORMAT:** PC WINDOWS
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** ADAM NIGHTINGALE
- » **LINK:** WWW.REMAKES.ORG/COMP2006
- » **PRICE:** FREE
- » **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY

A long time ago in arcades far away, Atari ruled the gaming world with a terrible self-destructive power and a young Jedi by the name of Mike Hally developed a vector-based game called *Star Wars*.

Such was the magnitude of his creation, Atari's future should have been secured for decades, but despite its success, the Atari bureaucrats would continue to crush anyone who tried to help them, let the game go out of licence and instead put its faith in a pug ugly alien with a luminous finger.

We all know *Star Wars*. It's a monster that its creator no longer understands, a monster that draws us to it no matter how many times it has let us down in the past and like Saddam Hussein, is a monster that has been with us all our adult lives until very recently.

Now, almost a quarter of a century after its original arcade release Adam Nightingale has brought *Star Wars* to a new audience. Gone are the wire frame vectors that defined the Eighties classic, and in come filled polygons. Out goes the mono soundtrack, to be replaced with a fresh updated stereo version. Luckily the excellent digitised speech remains untouched.

For the yet to be initiated (where have you been living?), the player takes control of Luke Skywalker and his X-Wing Fighter. Focusing on the final Death Star assault, *Star Wars* begins with you flying towards the technological terror all guns blazing taking out TIE Fighters and gun turrets en masse, only to finish with a frantic, exhilarating run down the Death Star's trench. It perfectly captures the spirit of the original game and really makes you feel like you are Luke Skywalker himself, which is quite absurd for a 30-something fat guy.

Graphically the game is superb and throttles along smoothly; the aural masterpiece that was the original has been recreated here in stereo and adds perhaps more than any other soundtrack has to a game, such is the force of John Williams' superb score. Mouse control is fluid and presents more than enough control for Padawans everywhere.

Download it and prepare to smile like a small child for the rest of the month.

RATING **90%**

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» The classic gaming moment.



» Geesh! I remember when all this was vectors.

BOMBZUKA

BACK FROM OBLIVION BUT SOON TO RETURN

- » **FORMAT:** WINDOWS PC
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** XCEPT
- » **LINK:** WWW. RETROREMAKES.ORG
- » **PRICE:** FREE
- » **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY



» Don't be frightened, you can do it.

If ever there was a game that found itself in the wrong place at the wrong time it was *Bombuzal*. As well as being designed for systems already laden with some excellent puzzle games, somehow Image Works had managed to mirror *Bombuzal*'s launch date with the 16-bit release of Hewson's excellent *Nebulas*. Needless to say, despite receiving reasonable scores, *Bombuzal* quickly visited puzzling heaven.

So it's nice to see that almost 20 years after its first outing someone has remembered the cute little bombardier and remade it in an attempt to pull *Bombuzal* from its current divine rest.

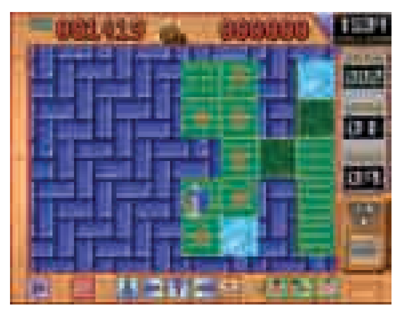
Bombzuka, as this direct remake is now known, is effectively the same game that graced floppy drives all those years ago, and unlike other remakes, doesn't differ greatly from the original.

Playing like nothing before, or since for that matter, you're required to clear various grids of bombs. Each grid takes shape as a series of blocks and our large-nosed protagonist must detonate the randomly scattered bombs in a way that clears the grid, but leaves him clear of the impending explosions (yes, it's as tricky as it sounds). All the grids can be viewed in a variety of different ways, but the top down view is the only one that consistently allows for fluid play.



» Bombzuka sees his dad Qbert for the first time in years.

Bombzuka himself is controlled via the mouse or cursor keys. Holding down the action button when on a bomb square detonates the bomb. Once activated each bomb gives a five second countdown before exploding – if Bombzuka hasn't moved in this time a life is lost.



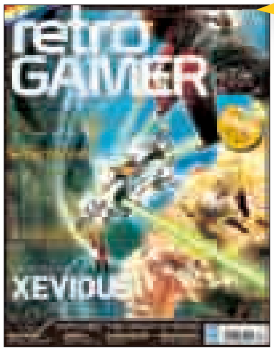
» The ice poses even more of threat than the bombs, casting Bombzuka over the side.

Bombzuka is a decent remake of a less than average game, the puzzles at first clever become samey and tedious and after an hour or so you just don't care enough to continue. Where *Nebulas* once beat *Bombuzal* to the top of the 16-bit charts, *Clockwiser* has left *Bombzuka* shivering in its wake in the Retro Remakes competition.

RATING **62%**

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER!

STRIKE A LIGHT GUV

Dear Retro Gamer,
Although I agree with your *EA Replay* score that appeared in Issue 33 – I imported a copy just before Christmas and was thoroughly disappointed – I thought you might like to know that not all of the games present are from the Mega Drive, as quoted in your review.

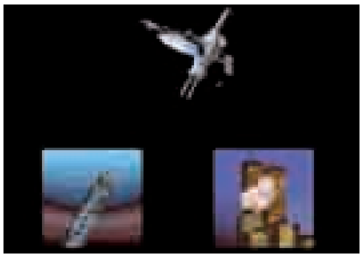
Wing Commander, Wing Commander: Secret Missions and *Ultima VII* are all SNES versions. I know this for certain as none of them were actually released on the Mega Drive in any shape or form. I'm also pretty certain that *B.O.B* is the SNES version as well, or at least the horizontal SNES style box-art suggests that it is.

As for *Urban Strike* not featuring in the compilation, I'd imagine it's to do with the fact that it features the Twin Towers and Electronic Arts just didn't want to upset anybody (and who could blame them). Have a look at the following two screenshots I have included – as you can see, they could prove quite unsettling.

Keep up the great work on the mag and I'm greatly looking forward to John's feature on prototype consoles (for some reason it didn't make this month's issue as originally promised).
Matt, via email

Thanks for the informative email Matt. While we've stated in the past that one of the main reasons we weren't looking forward to EA Replay *was its choice of SNES and Mega Drive reports, we obviously neglected to mention this in the review. Doh.*

The Urban Strike *info is particularly interesting and its omission obviously now makes perfect sense. Treat yourself to a T-Shirt and Plug 'N' Play pack. You deserve it.*



» A harrowing sight that will strike a chord with everybody around the world.



» A game where you can blow up the Twin Towers? It's little wonder EA pulled *Urban Strike* (although it took sharp-eyed Matt to point it out to us).



EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy Retro Gamer T-Shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a Sega Mega Drive Plug 'N Play pack. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls; failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

OLD IS BEST

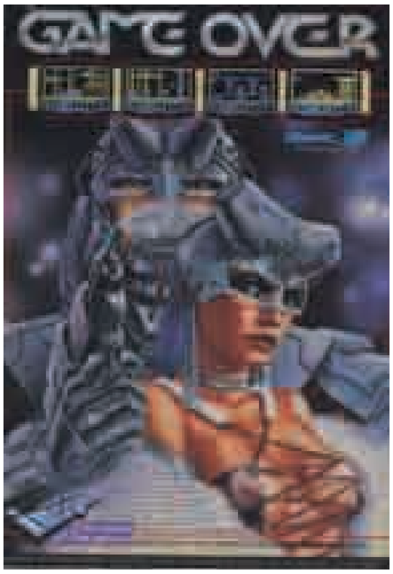
Dear Retro Gamer,
Just picked up your magazine for the very first time and I just wanted to say a very warm thank you.

It's great to be able to read about the games and machines that I grew up with. I've finally realised that I was actually there at the birth of a brand new industry, and like many of your readers, I have a great love of older systems and games. I don't think that it is my rose-tinted spectacles that make me think games were far more enjoyable back then. It's just that, back then, everything was so fresh and exciting.

I'm not at all bothered by the current generation of consoles, probably because I think that you can't really reinvent the wheel!

One thing that has tickled me while reading through the new issue is to see that people are still complaining about the various adverts that are appearing in videogame magazines – only back in the Eighties it was because an advert for a game called *Game Over* dared to show – if you squinted hard enough – half a nipple. Good God! No wonder the Eighties was known as the decade of decadence…
Craig Thornton, Lincoln

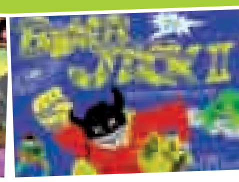
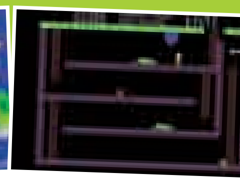
Hi Craig. It's always nice when we discover new people joining the Retro Gamer fold and you're certainly not unusual with your love of the older games over more recent systems. Here at Retro Gamer we like to embrace all games and we'll happily play Manic Miner *for hours before embarking on a vicious multiplayer game of* Gears Of War*. Good call on the* Game Over *advert of old though; it really was shocking when released. We've included a picture of it so that everyone can see what the fuss was about.*



» Was this the first nipple that many gamers of the late Eighties actually saw? Quite possibly…

TALES OF INTEREST

A side point in the Desert Island Discs article on Owen Rubin was interesting. It featured a kid who had reached the 57th level of *Major Havoc*, a game with no actual ending but which only hinted to it. Seems



to fit a plot line in a 1983 horror anthology called *Nightmares*. It featured a story called the 'Bishop of Battle'. The uncanny resemblance to *Major Havoc* and the tale of a kid searching for the 'final' level seems uncanny. Even more so is that the anthology was released in 1983, the same year as the game. Enjoy.
Danny, via email

That's probably one of the most spookiest videogame facts we've ever come across and we'll now have to track down Nightmares *to read it for ourselves. Incidentally, if you're looking for other disturbing trivia related to the world of retro, check out this pic of Darran dressed as Mario at our Christmas party. Will somebody please think of the children?*



» Don't expect this to start appearing on the Editor's page any time soon. We want to keep our loyal readers.

MASTER BLASTER

Dear Retro Gamer,
I love your magazine. I stumbled upon it in a city newsagent a few months ago (Issue 25), and have been reading it cover to cover every issue since. It's a wonderful magazine that's a joy to read through, but I do have some requests.

I'd love to see a Definitive *Ultima* feature, including all the spin-off games (including the dodgy Nintendo versions, the beautiful Master System version and the *Worlds Of Ultima*/*Underworld* games); speaking of Sega, is there any chance that more Sega Master System games will begin to grace your pages? I know the machine didn't really light any fires in the UK, but it did very well in Australia. *Psycho Fox, Ultima IV, Spellcaster, Alex Kidd In Shinobi World, Wonderboy II* and *III, Fantasy Zone* and *Phantasy Star* are all games that I used to love playing and would love to see featured in the mag (perhaps we could even have a Master System Retroinspection?)

FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW: WHAT'S THE WORST VIDEOGAME SEQUEL YOU'VE EVER PLAYED?

ID: Sega2006
Home Alone 2. One BIG question: why the hell does a great percentage of New York want to kill a little kid? You have to get a rifle to stay alive, A RIFLE? This is supposed to be a game made from a family film not a bloodbath action movie.

ID: Dudley
Back To The Future 3. A game so badly tested it's been proven impossible to pass Level 1 on some versions.

ID: SirClive
R-Type 2. They took a brilliant game and cranked up the difficulty to a level that made it only slightly more enjoyable than water torture.

ID: learnedrobb
Jet Set Willy 2… totally pointless.

ID: Paranoid Marvin
Strip Poker 2... we've see it all before.

ID: HEAVYface
Strider 2 on the Mega Drive. US gold you suck.

ID: Hiroke
Tomb Raider: The Angle Of Darkness. Nothing could have prepared me for the immense disappointment it was. Just about everything about it was wrong. It was so bad in fact that I traded it in before finishing it.

ID: Opa-Opa
Command & Conquer: Renegade. EA had an awful FPS lying around and needed to shift it, *C+C* always sells well to its loyal army of fans so lets just call our rubbish FPS *C+C Renegade*. Job done.

ID: The Master
Repton 2 on the Beeb was rubbish – the only way you could possibly win it was to leave your computer switched on for months, by which time it would have turned into an off-yellow pile of lizard goo all by itself.

ID: The Universal
Halo 2 – they shipped it on one disc when it was quite obviously a two-disc game. Funny how it didn't get recalled – I mean it just ends after the intro, nice one Bungie.

ID: revgiblet
World War II. What was that all about?

ID: Wils
Barbarian 2 dispensed with everything enjoyable about the first (being a simple but great *Conan*-ish version of *Way Of The Exploding Fist*), instead opting for a boring screen-by-screen monster hack that ran like a particularly sticky turd.

ID: The Master
If they print mine in the magazine (finally-for once-at last), I'll put on a Repton suit and wander round various European cities raising money for some kind of retro-gaming related charity.

ID: sirclive1
The speccy version of *Way Of The Exploding Fist 2* was very poor – I spent two weeks paper round money on that. It still hurts.

ID: Will2097
Alone In The Dark 2. What the f**k went wrong? I played this today. Or at least I tried too… again. It's like a big fat women with flatulence has sat on my brain. *Alone In The Dark* was inspired, *Alone In The Dark 2* is not.

ID: Mad Maintenance Man
Chuckie Egg 2 on the C64 – so horrific they should have just called it Chuckie.

THE RETRO FORUM



» Is this one of the greatest consoles ever made? Rom from Australia certainly seems to think so.

I'd also be interested to know what you think about *Faxanadu* on the NES – this was one of my favourite console games for years, and I still go back to it every now and then. Were the people behind this great title responsible for any other games I should know about? Last but not least, what about a couple of Developer Look Backs for Origin Systems and Looking Glass Software?

Anyway, thanks for giving me a reason to froth at the mouth every four or five weeks – I'm currently looking forward to Issue 31, which I realise will be old news to you all!
Cheers,
Rom, Australia

Glad to hear you're enjoying the magazine Rom. You'll be pleased to discover that Issue 32 has an eight-page feature on the Phantasy Star *games, while this month's issue (once you finally get it) has two whole pages dedicated to the excellence that was* Zillion*. As for Origin Systems and Looking Glass Software, we'll see what we can do.*

EMULATE THIS… HOW?

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just wanted to say that I love Issue 33. I have been waiting for ages for an article about the Amiga CD32 and was so pleased with Ashley Day's excellent feature. The only thing that puzzles me is that you haven't done an Emulate This article about it. I would love to know how to emulate the machine properly and want to know if I can expect a guide in an upcoming issue or if you're no longer going to bother.
Thanks for a great magazine…
Ben, via email

You're not the first person to ask about the missing CD32 emulator guide, so we'll do our best to explain what's happening. All magazines have to go through changes if they're to remain fresh and exciting and Retro Gamer is no exception. As of next month you'll start seeing a few differences in the mag (don't worry, it's nothing major) and the home-brew section is one of the first parts that we'll be changing. This month's Saturn for example suffers from some extremely ropey emulators (Satourne is one of the best but requires specific graphics card) so it seems silly to feature emulator guides that don't enable you to run the games as they were originally intended.



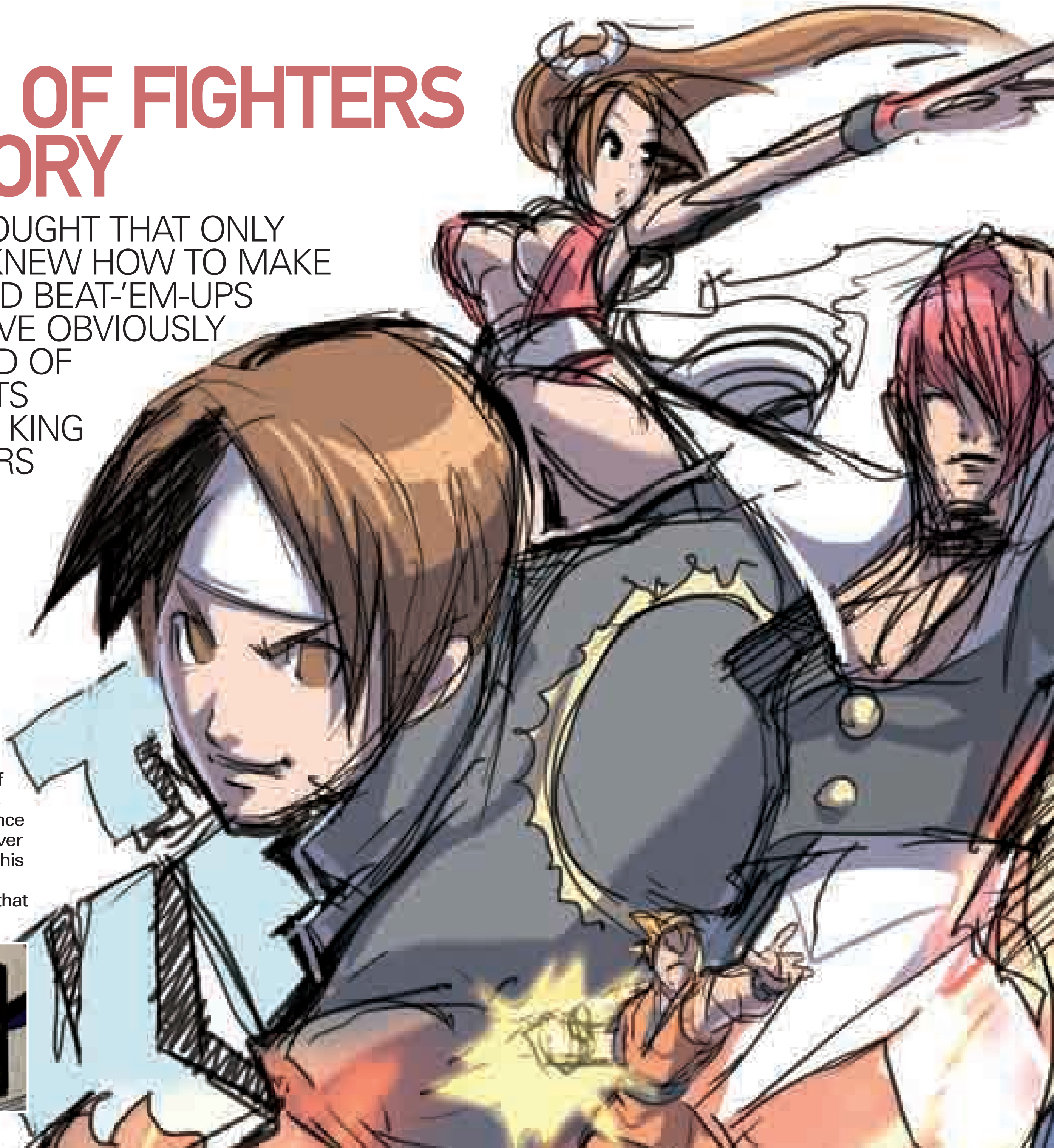
» *Tower Assault* and *Simon The Sorceror*. Just two classic Amiga CD32 games that you can play on the original hardware.



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KING OF FIGHTERS HISTORY

IF YOU THOUGHT THAT ONLY CAPCOM KNEW HOW TO MAKE SEMINAL 2D BEAT-'EM-UPS THEN YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY NOT HEARD OF SNK AND ITS FANTASTIC KING OF FIGHTERS SERIES.



GAMING'S ILLUMINATI

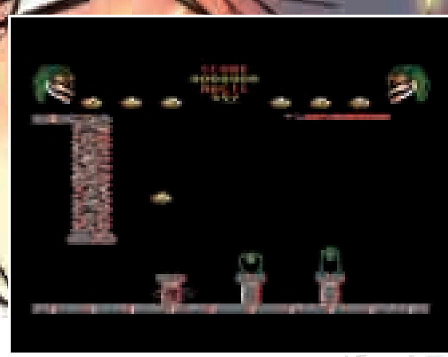
In the second part of our in-depth feature, John Szczepaniak once again goes undercover in order to finish off his fascinating take on a side of the industry that you never see.





THE MAKING OF…

"Big Money, big prizes. I love it!" Eugene Jarvis reveals how he turned his classic *Robotron* into a futuristic game show blastathon.



THE MAKING OF…

It's not often that you get to play a videogame that stars a witch and a pumpkin head. Retro Gamer talks to the creators of the *Cauldron* games.

NEXT ISSUE

retro GAMER THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

LOAD 35

ON SALE 01 MAR 2007



THE DEFINITIVE...

Stuart Campbell puts on a bandana, grabs a machine gun and charges head-first into one of gaming's most beloved run-'n'-gun franchises.



COMPANY PROFILE

The amount of games Zenobi Software released is truly staggering. Retro Gamer braces itself and prepares to talk to the Balrog.



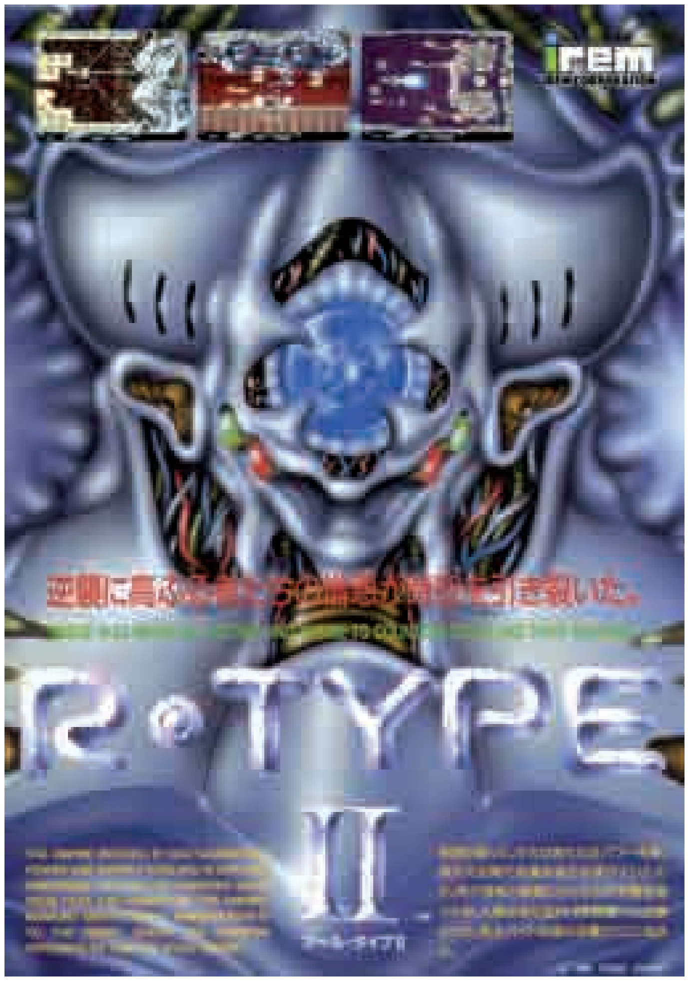


RETROINSPECTION...

VECTREX Despite being a work of genius, the Vectrex appeared at totally the wrong time. Retro Gamer tries to find out where it all went wrong.

AND THE REST...

- Back To The Eighties
- Eastern Promise
- The Classic Game
- Retro Rated
- Retro Revival
- And much, much more

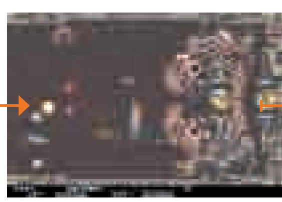


R-TYPE II

Undeterred by its last arse-kicking at the lasers of your R-9 fighter, the Bydo Empire has once again launched a full assault on humanity. Guess who's been called in to save the day again…



SCREEN 1
The bosses in *R-Type* may have been gruesome, but nothing will prepare you for the monstrous bio-mechanical freaks you'll be meeting in *R-Type II*. After destroying hundreds of enemy Bydo craft you eventually come face to face with the final icky looking boss.



SCREEN 2
This last mayor has obviously been studying Puffin's "So you want to be the ultimate boss?", because he proves to be a right pain to defeat, and to make matters worst he seems to be feeding off the ships you're supposed to be rescuing. The swine!



SCREEN 3
Oh come on, did you really think evil was going to triumph? Still, you may have taken out the final boss, but the whole base is about to self destruct, so you now have to frantically make your way to the exit before you're consumed in a fiery inferno.



SCREEN 4
Just when it looks like you've turned into a dead end, the freed R-9 fighters appear on screen and help you escape imminent death. It's like when the Millennium Falcon escapes from the second Death Star as it explodes but without the rubbish plastic aliens.



SCREEN 5
Excellent, the Bydo Empire has been defeated for a second time, you've managed to rescue all the kidnapped fighters and all is well with the world. Now when's *R-Type III: The Third Lightning* going to appear on the Virtual Console?